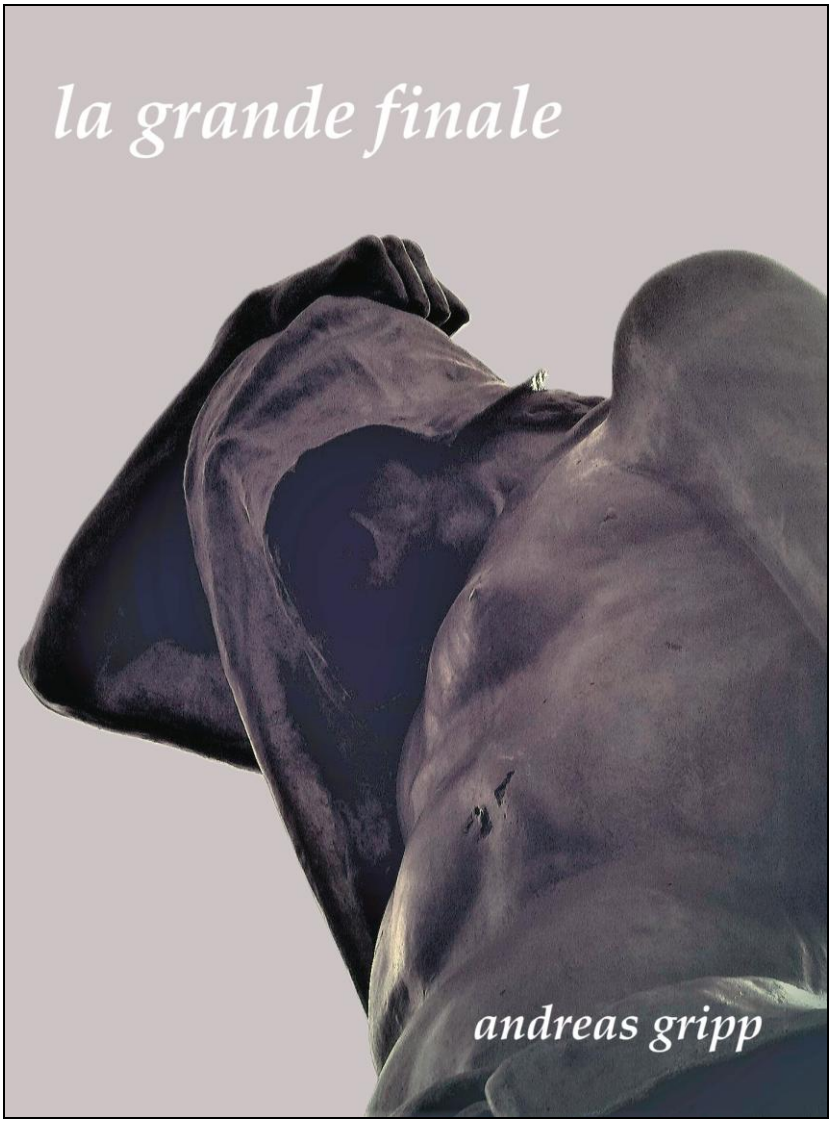
la grande finale



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la grande finale

Andreas Gripp

Beliveau Books

La Grande Finale
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My Cat Is Half-Greek,
or Zeus Left the Acropolis Open Again

My cat communes
with the mythical, with the infinite
and glorious invisible,
getting an inside track
on the weather
and when the sky's
about to change its tune.

My cat leaps up and tells me
whenever it's about to rain,
by the way she wiggles her whiskers
and tilts her head
beside the bathroom wall.

My cat instinctively knows
when it's going to pour
in Noachian proportions,
when the neighbours
will pound the door
and beseech us to let them in,
their basements flooded
and the water still rising.

Silly cat, tumbling around
with slanted head
and twitching whiskers—
I'm only turning on the shower.
Go back to your bed of sleep—
and *dream*
of chasing moths
in the garden,
the sun more vivid
than an Orion Nova
and your shadow in pursuit
as you run.

Let's not talk of storms today
despite the warnings
you sense from above:

Perhaps those sounds you hear
are the thunderous applause
from the pantheons up from their seats,
as Taurus snags the matador;

the rumbling
that of Hercules in hunger,

starving for the love of Deianeira,
she who brings his eyes
to overflow
with spit and drizzle,

a few simple sobs
to remind us men and beasts
that the deities too
feel that which pains us all,
blotting out the sun
when there's none to share
their sorrow.

Or it may only be Aphrodite
who is beckoning
you for dinner,
unaware you have a home
with *me,*
cavorting with the mortals
since we bow to your meows
and purrs,

our closest, intimate link
to both the eternal
and the divine.

November Rose

It's a Jane or Johnny-come-lately,
the solitary rose in my garden,
a harvest holdover or belated bloom
that's risen when the others have died.

It has none to compete for attention,
isn't lost in a sea of red.

I ponder its predicament,
think of it as lonely,
regretting it didn't blossom sooner
when the buzz of flying insects
were droning their affection.

I'll water it in the evening,
as stars speck the sky in Autumn's cool.
I'll sing it to sleep
as I retire,
pray for grace
should the frost strike swift.

The Language of Sparrows

Our daughter is dead.

We plant seedlings
by her grave in April,
when Spring seduces
with all its promise,
moisten the ground
with a jug of water
and say how, years from now,
a bush will burst and flower,
be home to a family of sparrows,
each knowing the other by their name.

I ask you if birds have names,
like *Alice, Brent, Jessica* and *James,*
if their parents
call these fledglings
when it rains,
say *settle here in branches*
among the leaves that keep you dry—
not in English, mind you,
or any other human tongue
but in the language of sparrows;

each trill, each warbling,
a repartee,
a crafted conversation of the minds.

I then notice
that we never see their wings
amid the showers,
how they disappear in downpours,
seeking shelter
in something we simply cannot see.

When we're old,
when we come to remember
the belovèd we have lost,
the *songs* will be shielded
in our shrub—
not a short and stunted one,
but a *grand,* blessèd growth,
like the one that spoke to Moses,
aflame, uttering
I AM WHO I AM,

one that towers,
dense with green,

a monument
to the child whom we treasured
and the feathers she adored,
naming the formerly fallowed, *hallowed,*
sacred, *remove your shoes,*
Spirits and Sparrows dwell
and sibilate secrets
we're unworthy to glean.

Nine

There's a beauty to our numbers
that I note with admiration:

the shape of cipher 6
and its curving, crescent close;

8, with its weaving, double loop
that skaters strive and scratch to mimic;

3, and its ability to complete,
to divide as trilogy, to *manifest*
as Trinity;

1 which finds the wholeness
in *itself,* never wishing to *flee*
its core or essence,
for the sake of multiplying:

One times one times one
will always equal one.

2 is the sum of love,
the most romantic of all our digits,

and in terms of teaching math,
it gives a break to all our children:

Two times two is four,
and the answer's the same
when adding.

7 is Biblical,
the week for God's creation,
the length of telling tales
of *Harry Potter,* of *Narnia,*
the complement of 12.

5, the Books of Moses,
the fingers and thumb
on our hands,
giving us ability,
the gift of grasp
and molding, making shapes
from slabs of clay.

4, a pair of couplets,
the voice of poems
and song, the rhythm
and march of the saints.

Yet when I come to number 9,
my spirit starts to sink:

it has such *lofty* expectations,
aspiring to reach new levels,
only to fall so painfully short—

missing the mark of 10
by just a meagre, single stroke;
always being known for
"almost there,"
remembered for the glory
it could have gained
but never got,
its cousins—19, 49, 69—
bearing the brunt
of all its failings.

99 is but a stepping stone,
a grating *lapse* towards 100,
a number we only *watch* while it rolls,
a humble *countdown* to celebration,
unable to give us merit on its own.

I spent all of '99
yearning for 2000,
anticipating a new millennium,

the fears, excitement
we thought awaited us
in a dawning, changing world;
never enjoying the year for what it was,
practicing the writing
of an exotic date—

January 1, 2000

and eager to see
the masthead of that early morning paper,

ridding myself of the nines
that only accentuate defeat,

thinking I'll *pass* some kind of threshold,
a singing, flowered archway
bidding *come, enter,*
leave what troubles you
behind.

The girl I would have married

The girl I would have married
had we met
is on the other side of the street,
a walking blur
I only notice for a second.

And her hair is a shade of blonde
or maybe brown I can't recall,
nor anything about the jacket
she'd been wearing nor the boots,
only that for some silly unknown reason
we would have married had we met,

maybe at the bookshop
where I would have bumped her arm,
said sorry for my blatant
clumsiness, which caused her to drop her
classics and a dictionary too;

or it may have been at a party,
hosted by a mutual
friend,
finding that we shared
a favourite song,

or that we're social
democrats,
or that neither of us
can stand
the sight of blood;

then again,
it may have been something
random—

her seated in the row
just ahead,
in a theatre
with a paltry slope,
her failure to remove the hat
that blocked my view,
my gathering the brazen courage
to tap her shoulder,
whisper into her ear
that I'm unable to see a thing.

The Decoy

My hunter friend,
the one I haven't converted
to my "animals have feelings too"
frame of mind, uses
a wooden decoy
in an attempt
to lure some ducks,

the painted, smiling duplicate
successful
in its duty:
three already *shot,*
bagged and ready to carve.

If objects had living souls,
I wonder how it would feel:

a *traitor,*

causing the *death*
of what it mimics,

floating on water
like a wannabe bird,

even feign it could fly
if it *wanted* to,
have its pick
of choicest mates;

like *Pinocchio,*
eager to be turned
into the real
thing,

hoping its rifle-bearing
Gepetto

will make it
flesh and bone, allow
a brook of blood to pump
throughout
its winding veins,

wish it might *even*
bring salvation
to this hunter's
calloused heart,

spot a chance
at its own redemption,

have its maker
see its feathered shape
as something
more than prey.

Before You Die

Before You Die, it seems,
has been springing up in bookstores
all over the place.

"1001 Movies to See Before You Die"—
double-faced in Performing Arts.

"1001 *Places* to See Before You Die"—
yields a tepid trudge to Travel.

And every genre,
it seems, has its own
Arabian Nights-inspired thing to do
before the hooded hangman calls:

"1001 Foods to Eat *Before You Die"*
"1001 Albums to Hear *Before You Die"*
"1001 Books to Read
Before You Fucking Die"

It's worth noting
that with all this talk of death,
the titles continue to fly
and booksellers can scarcely keep up.

Maybe that's due to the fact
that you're never, ever told
exactly *how* you'll die,
for it's unlikely you'll see:

"1001 Dances to Learn
Before You Develop Cancer"
or
"1001 Liqueurs to Drink
Before You Get Hit by a Train"
OR
"1001 Puzzles to Solve
Before You Get Shot in the Head"

Perhaps we prefer that Death
keep its *own* swell of incense,
its *own* black curtain,
its *own* cryptic crossword,
one not deciphered
by reader or writer alike.

But why that extra *one* after *one thousand?*
That little bonus, as a P.S. or encore—

to make amends
for the penultimate trip or film?

Where you're much too anxious
about your impending expiry
to *enjoy* that stroll in Oahu ...
too *perturbed* about your nearing demise
to *laugh* through *A Day at the Races* ...

and only Banks' allusion
to *The Sweet Hereafter*
will make that final book
even tolerable.

Paris, Ontario

This one is not so Grand
as its river, no Seine
cutting at its heart
or couples arm-in-arm
amid *je t'aime.*

We can see
the eroding townscape
from this crowded
rooftop bistro,
and there's a soufflé
on the menu you'd like to try,
while I scan the varied wine list
for *Château Valfontaine.*

We made a *hard,* last-minute
turn off the 403, figured
Brantford would be dull,
there's only so much
Bell and Gretzky
we can digest, yet again.

And substituting for a tower?
There's the truss bridge
serving the railway
that traverses the muddy banks,
its lattice now a respite
for a dozen, migrating flocks,

and, upon which, the locals say,
some have confessed their love;
plunged down in *ultime liberté*.

Early Morning Rain

In the yard,
you felt sorry for the slug
that crept so slowly up the stem
of one of your greens.

Poor thing,
it doesn't even have a shell
to call a home.

Afterward,
I compared it with its cousin,
the snail, several of which will
gather in the garden
after an early morning rain—

sturdy,
in the swirly cave it carries
on its back,
a place to retract its head in
when it pours,

feigning it isn't there, perhaps,
should a desperate, homeless mollusk
come to call,

knowing there *isn't*
any room
for two,

and yet burdened
by that extra weight,
its inability to travel
wherever it may wish,
at its turtle-like, sloth-like pace,
like a car that's always pulling
a camper/trailer,

never having the mettle
to face the world
when things get tough,
even ducking in its hovel
when there isn't a cloud
in the sky.

The Carnation

The carnation I left you
was given with much pondering—
not as romantic, they'll say,
as its more belovèd, historic rival,
the rose;

not as many songs and poems
describing its allure;

without plethora
of oil paintings
to capture its pale pink *petals*
on canvas—

but please remember, darling,
they'll endure while the others drop,
even if but a day,
those extra, precious hours to say
I love you, I'm sorry, come back to me.

A Place Beneath the Water

We drive to the beach
the day you're released
from the hospital,
the pills afloat in your glass
currently a memory
taken by tides;

and I suggest a brief, brisk swim
in cleansing waves,
to wash the stress
from your battered mind,
and you strip-down rather hastily,
splash about as a child might,
as you did when you were a girl,

and I lose sight of you
in a panic of thirty seconds,
as you submerge your head
and hold your breath
for a protracted half-a-minute,
attempting to touch
that part of yourself
where the air cannot reach
nor light tell the world
what you've hid.

Metronome

You never had a clock
within your home,
just a single metronome,
keeping tempo
more important
than the time;

its clicks a call to dance,
without the chains
of *start* and *stop*,
that never
issue edicts
to awaken,
no pre-set ring
to jolt
from peaceful dreams,

no big and little hands
that point to numbers
which command,
saying *when* it's time to eat
and when to leave,
when to walk the dog
or check for mail,

just a steady, rhythmic beat
of unfettered sound,
the passing of the hours
all unnamed.

Another Hallmark Moment

On Valentine's,
I didn't think of hearts
but of shamrocks,
of St. Patrick,
the lush and kelly greens
of the Irish,
the luck that clovers bring.

So leave your blood-filled, beating
organ at the door
and your chocolates, flowers, with it.
Let me pine for almost Spring
and a romp under leaves,
through grasses.
You can have your snowy day
and diamonds, pearls, to go.
You can have your lover's kiss
and night of heated sex—

no, I'm lying.
Forgive me, Triune God,
and Mr. & Mrs. O'Shea.

Your time has not yet come,

for I need to *hold* and *be* held,
love and *be* loved and *make* love,
and dream of Dublin another day,
another month, when the vestige of red
has melted with the white.

Haight-Ashbury

The temperature in our apartment
is always moderate,
20 Celsius, or as our friends in
San Francisco call it, *68*,

never too frigid,
too torrid, as pleasant as its people
who birthed a twentieth-
century love of gay and poetry,
where Ginsberg howled
and Ferlinghetti kept the city
lights plugged in,

grateful for their dead, their ’67
a narrow notch
before some elusive ideal,
one that ever-hovers
within our reach.

You say *never touch*
the thermostat
and I mildly acquiesce.
What we call *warmth*
is but the middle,

the centre of some utopia—
absent of fire and ice.

Yes, the ground there occasionally
quakes, much like our walls and
ceiling do, whenever the tenants
upstairs
argue about the bills

or break into a dance
we've been curious to behold.

The Ruse of Mild Air

In this warmer than normal winter,
the trees are budding early,
in February's
rain instead of snow.

I feel I ought to go outside
and *bring* some soothing tea,
play a tranquil song
for harp and strings,

be the sandman for a spell,
send the rousing leaves-to-be
back into their shells,

lest the winds return from the north,
puddles freeze over,
and greening branches waken
to a bird-less lie of ice.

Fabric Carnations,
or My Dog was a Vegetarian

The flowers in my house are a fraud,
marigolds that never wither,
forsythia forever fake
with vibrant yellow
that doesn't fade,
daisies dotted about
as if I had an eternal supply,
the faint of sight
and squinters
never guessing
the awful truth,
nor those who call, congested,
unaware
they're counterfeit.

For years, *before* I built
what's bogus,
this simulated sham of silk,
every bluebell, phlox and lily
were rich in wondrous
redolence,
concealing the smell of "Spot"—

my shaggy, shedding dog
with neither blotch
nor original name,

who'd eat the roses
when in season,
plucking petals
when backs were turned.

The dog was mine for a decade,
had a couch he claimed as his own,
an old stuffed cat
with which he played
but never thought
to bite or chew.

When he died,
I was told to go back
to blooms, genuine,
the ones that I'd discarded
after "Spot" had overate,

rid the rooms of imitations,
inhale the fragrant scent
of life.

It's *all* a fabrication
I replied: aromas
from the freshly
cut, telling the world
they're bleeding,
their beauty-in-a-vase,
embalming;

that flowers too
love living
as much as a man
or departed pet,

that my *forgeries*
are better,
no perfumes
to pronounce what's dead.

Cassiopeia

On our anniversary,
we spend the evening
gazing at the stars

yet not as lovers do,
making wishes
on ones that fall,
but imagining instead
there's an alien couple out
there on some distant
speck-of-a-world,

not quite as human as us,
with a few of their organs
flipped around,
but still the kind of people
we'd relate to,

not as deeply "in love"
as before,
yet *enough*
to never leave
the other,

and we wonder
if they think
they'd each be happier
in another's arms,

if they too
have awkward silence
in the aftermath
of a quarrel,

if they believe that they can last,
at least, until the offspring
are all grown up,

if they envision
what it would feel like
to have their spouse,
unexpectedly,
pass away,

and if they'd ever survive
a frigid night
looking *up* at the sky
without them.

This is the Reason

I've never written you
a love letter, as I did for the girls
I crushed on in school,
vowing a childish *forever love.*

I've been told that *both*
can never be truly promised,
there are too many variables
upon which they can falter—

an unexpected loss
of mind and memory,
the foreboding phantom
of infidelity,

that our lifespans
are simply too long,
the decay of what we were
befalling while we breathe,

that the warbler outside my
window, his years but a
jaunt through junior high,
says it better,

his skyward pledge
to his treetop mate
daily putting me to shame.

Francesca, Weeding the Garden

My daughter, all of six
and bursting with a Big Bang
sort of energy,
zigzags across our fenced
backyard,
picking dandelions she holds
in her fist,
for an "I love you daddy" bouquet,
like the lofty ones
I snagged for her mother
before the tumors took her away,
their sunny heads of yellow
jutting freely from curling fingers,
my steady, sturdy voice
now a downcast, trembling shell,
saying *they last a little longer*
than flowers,
we'll wish you better
when they turn to spores.

Winter Solstice

Christmas
with an ex-lover
is spent whenever
there's time to spare,

so *today* I invited you over,
with the promise of friendship
and fire,
hoping for kindling wood,

but the flames are merely embers,
like the Sun in its tepid glow,
forsaking us much too soon
on this shortest day of the year.

So I'll make you Darjeeling,
my darling,
suddenly *clasp* your hand
into mine—
for gauging a glove size, I'll say,
feigning I've shopping to do,
the warmth of tea and touch
creating such a beautiful lie.

La Belle

La pomme de terre,
the potato, the earth apple,
its womb a warmth of ground,
unable to tempt the eyes
of unfallen man.

The apple, *la pomme,*
kept cool among the branches
by an evening's autumn sky,
painted so very often,
the centre of our lore.

In French they're more poetic,
sounding
that much better
on the ear,
no bitter taste
that settles
on the tongue,
no judgement on their worth.

Le poème,
the poem,

that hovers in the vacant space
between,
the fruit of ground and tree,

the one I wish I'd render
en Français,
to mask the many flaws
that come when beauty
can't be seen.

Marooning the Muse

We sat at the beach *together*
but I didn't write a thing.
I looked to the horizon
and its meeting of sky and sea
and the cerulean they both shared
at the point where we see
the world is round indeed.

You wrote of sandpipers
on the strand and the seagulls
encircling the trawler
traversing the harbour,

and I left you the metaphors
to find while I was lost in a reverie
that had Magellan meeting
Eratosthenes
on the edge of a precipice,
saying yes, it's all an illusion,
this vortex of birds and their fish,
this looping of ships and our poems.

Miracle

Tonight I will ask you to marry me.
You will surely say I am mad,
in the British sense of the word,
then laugh off my promise to love
and commit as I-must-have-stopped-
over-at-the-pub-and-had-a-few-too-
many before our coffee date on this
insignificant, middle-of-the-week
kind of evening.

But this day is anything but ordinary:
Look at my hands, they are stained
from painting my kitchen
the colour that is your favourite

though my eyesight has been failing,
and I'm convinced that both our God
and the birds have given us their blessing
as shoots sprouted in my garden
overnight—
from seeds dropped from above

and the weather person on TV
said there'd be no rain
for the next seven Saturdays to come.

Flower Children

It's hard to believe that crotchety old man
and his wife hobbling into the store
where I work were once hippies.
Their faces creased like a shirt
I forgot to put in the dryer
and had no time to iron,
the man's pants pulled up to his chest
and his wife muttering something
about the pie she has to bake
for the Sunday church social.

I try to picture them at Woodstock,
a farmer's soggy field overrun
by painted young ladies
showing their bouncing, naked breasts
at a time of dawning liberation,
the man then bearded
without the faintest hint of grey
and both of them smoking pot
and waiting for Jefferson Airplane
to hit the stage.

I can't imagine them
listening to acid rock

or Led Zeppelin's vinyl debut
with its flaming Hindenburg crashing
to a hellish death in New Jersey.

I can't see the man swapping his
Arnold Palmer polo shirt
for a psychedelic tie-dye
and the woman with her midriff
bare and smooth, a peace sign
above her navel.

They ask if they can pay by cheque,
say they've never sent an email
when I suggest our online specials,
that they've yet to see our Insta page
and that TikTok is something
they never would have imagined
when they rolled in the mud over
half a century ago, dancing
as if they would never age a day.

Coda III

That page at the end of my notebook,
the one that is blank,
is the best poem of mine you've ever read,
you say to me as I choose which to keep,
which to toss and pretend I never wrote.

I went through it
when you were away, you reveal
in a tone bereft of innocence,
like a boy boasting to his friends
that he managed to swig some vodka
while his parents were in the basement,
perhaps sorting through laundry
or checking on the furnace
or doing something that required him
to be cunning and to seize the moment
like a vulture that dives to the ground
while the corpse is still warm enough
to pass for something living.

Your metaphors are silly, you say bluntly,
your analogies make me laugh—
those of scavenger, Russian drink,
mischievous youth.

Take the last sheet in your book,
the one without any writing:
it made more sense than anything else
you've rambled on about.

I reply that you are right,
that pallid vacancy and lines of blue
have more to say than verbosity,
that I should just write "white"
instead of "pallid,"
that I misread my spiny thesaurus,
that what is simplest
is most complex
and lives in a realm
no words can elucidate
or yield direction to;

that it's a sign of literary innovation
to have an entire volume
of nothing but lined paper,
that the next time I buy a notebook
I'm best off to merely scrawl my name
upon its cover
and wait for the accolades to pour in
from those who know the work of a
genius when they see it.

My lover hates Roy Clark
but hasn't heard of Sufjan Stevens

My composition of song,
for you, has been rejected,
not because the sentiments
were bad, or the structure
of verse and chorus,
but that I played the chords
on a banjo
when I should have used a guitar.

You say the *banjo*
is a trite,
hee-hawed thing,
for barefoot, hick-town loafers
with dangling straw
between their teeth.

I'd like to change the words,
dedicate it to another,
one who doesn't ridicule
the music of the mountain,

one who'd know its origins,
before Burl Ives' arrival.

Bania,
in the Mandingo tongue,
from the minstrels
of the African west,
whose moonlight lovers
never shunned
their poignant serenades.

América

The isthmus
was the adhesive
always holding us
together,

like fraternal twins
conjoined, locked
by a crooked rib.

And *though* it looked
quite thin,
brittle and ready to
snap,

the mightiest ships
of imperial fleets
could only
turn away,

to round Cape
Horn at a crawl,
to meet Pacific waves.

El Canal de Panamá,
christened in
'14,

in the summer
of the Serbian
shot.

Yes,
this brings us Yen
and Yuan.

Yes,
this hews in half
the journey.

But brother,
earthen-brother,

your breath
is not as close,
and strangers
sail the space
between our scars.

Strings of the Great Depression

In your chair,
covered in a shawl to warm you,
hot milk by your side,

arthritic, gnarled fingers
pulling limply
on elastics
(ones that held
your meds together),

you speak of your farmer-father,
coming home
without the radio
he'd promised,

and of rubber bands,
how he stretched them
over a can,
plucking them
with his thumb.

For music, he said,
while you eat.

The West Coast of Somewhere

As a boy, I saw only sand and sea
and stones I pitched with a splash
beneath the shifting animal clouds
that I envisioned.

As a single young man
on a day of sun and cirrus,
I knew nothing of rocks
and waves colliding with the shore,
only the flash of skin and curves
exposed for browning.

Now middle-aged in wedlock,
ambling along the beach
beside my wife,
I see the patterns on pebbles
and the gulls that dip for trout
while the crew of college girls,
jumping for *frisbees* in the surf,
are supposedly a blur below
this cumulus of savannah cats
overseeing their great,
ephemeral kingdom.

Omnipotence

I, more stolidly, tend to suspect that God
is a novelist—a garrulous and deeply
unwholesome one too.

—Martin Amis

As a novelist, you say,
you have the powers
of a god,
the death and life
of characters
in your potent, scribing hand—

deciding who is loved
and who survives,

who is buried
or burnt to ash,

strewn into the Ganges,
perhaps,

or left to *rest*
in a marble urn

over a family's
fireplace.

Piddling details
aside,
let's promote the *poet*
to the omnipotent Lord of yore,
a God unmatched by others,

mould the *world*
to what it really should have been
(from the start of *Genesis),*

when the Spirit had hovered
over the waters' face;

make a *Pangaea*
that never splits,
do away with all division,

trim the *claws* of carnivores,
let the lions chew the grapes
of flowered fields,

and if that's deemed
exorbitant,
at least allow your hero
the saving *kiss* of his belovèd—

do not let him
drink himself
to a shrivelled, pitied state,

nor allow his *neck*
to fit into
your frayed and knotted noose;

show the mercy you believe
you never got,

show the dead
and deities
how it could have been much
better—

if only *you*
had been in charge,

and do not await a Messiah's
return
to get the work that's needed
done—

do it now
and do it quickly,

in the loving,
triune lines
of your haiku.

Initials

After you left,
I carved our initials
into the stump of a fallen tree.
I tallied its age before death,
thought of its stunted remnant
as a trunk, soaring
to swirling heights, with arms
that housed the bliss of many birds,
our love now wrapped in the rings
that spoke of years, to a time
when heart and bark and wing
were very much alive.

Past Life Aggression

Perhaps I was a ruthless *Khan,*
vengeful, without mercy,
who cut down peasants
by the thousands,
taking an unsheathed sword
to young mothers and their babes;

or I may have dwelt in dungeons,
coaxing heretics to confess,
beat remorse from wicked witches
and any soul who wouldn't kneel
at the foot of the pious,
Papal throne.

Was I simply just a gadabout
who cheated on his wife? A *rogue*
who left his children
for the warmth
of a harlot's touch?

Did I ridicule the Crown,
crudely scrawl on Cambridge walls?

Did my horse
trample *Queen Anne's Lace?*
Had I ignored its defecation?

My dearest, would-be betrothed,
is the reason for your "no"
the fact I deserted my troops in the war?
Had I fled from German flags,
escaped an ambush out of fear?

Or was I incredibly initiative instead—
start a firestorm in Dresden,
drop a Nagasaki nuke?

Did I watch as the Chinese starved,
give my approval to the Red Star State?

If so, please forgive me my transgressions:
taking the Name
of the Lord in vain;
my callous *killings* of the innocent;
my drunken, playboy ways.

Impart to me your pardon,
your blessèd, fragrant kiss—
not the one that Judas gave
but the caress of *Juliet,*

the embrace of *Bouguereau*, eternal;
the one that ends the cycle,
trips karma at the finish line.

And Then There Was Light

With your hands wrist-deep
in the black of
loamy soil, you tell me your
infant daughter died
at break of dawn,
on a day our star
had benignly risen,
without a
hindering cloud;

and you mused that early morning,
as you sadly went and found her,
stiff as a *Hasbro* doll,
her unblinking eyes
locked upon the ceiling,
that to call it "sun" is a misnomer,
for it's connected to *Mother* Earth,
and either "u" or "o", it says the same
masculine thing.

It's the *female*
that reproduces,
you said, gives seeds
a place to call home.

"Daughter," you decreed,
call it Daughter.

It will surely love us more
and our longing will be greater
on the days it isn't there.

Anthem

The path to peace it's said
is found in sacred books of old,
on parchment, scrolls and ink;
in a choir's hallelujah,
ringing bells and fervent prayer.

Let's scribe our wishful reveries,
our old prophetic songs,
say the bomb will never fall;
that police will join the protest
and the judge will grant a pardon
to the Harlem kid in chains.

For it's not that hard to add a verse
and paint a pretty picture:

Governments disband,
there's no more need to demonstrate;
and prison gates swing open,
those who leave bear violets,
while violence drops as dust.

Faith begets trust,
trust begets love,

and the one who was your enemy
brings you candy in the night,
saying all is calm in Jerusalem,
and flags are neither waved
nor burned.

Hearing Ted Hughes at Plunkenworth's

Our friend dropped in again,
the one who always says
he's met some rather famous poets,
like Billy Collins, Rita Dove,
Molly Peacock,
boasting he's taken them out for beer,
that in their drunken state
they've read his work
and said it was the best damn thing
they've ever seen on paper.

It's been difficult to prove him a liar,
authors and their tours
have coincided with his claims

but this time he was sloppy,
saying he'd heard Ted Hughes—
last night, at Plunkenworth's,
the run-down, downtown gallery

that *exhibits*
molds of vomit
by its barely-on-its-hinges
front door.

He's been dead
a quarter-century, we said,

snickering, knowing we finally
found the lie,
that he'd admit it's been a charade,
the name-dropping, the tales
of autographed books
(that we've *never* been allowed
to see).

But he didn't blink an eye,
unfazed, undaunted in his delivery,
saying that Ted had read
a *dozen,* brand-new poems—

one about Plath—

how he would have *rushed*
to save her,
turn off the oven,
inhale the toxic fumes
if he only could,
calling it "Sylvie's Stove,"

and we corrected him,
saying it was *Sylvia,* not *Sylvie*

but he said *no,*
that was an affectionate name
he called her, very *French*
as she really loved the
language,

that he'd come back from the grave
just to read it,

even if but a single
person
listened, believed
that he was sorry,

that the dead
could be so sorry.

Juanita

The email labelled as "junk"
by my vigilant catcher of spam
says "dearest one"
in the subject.
Though I wish it weren't so,
I confess I don't recognize
the sender,
Juanita McTavish,
of Spanish-Scottish descent
no doubt.

She's indicative
of the many others
who send me junk,
all with unusual names
that speak of cultural
intercourse:

Vladimir Cobb, Horatio Singh,
Mumanabe Parker,

all just saying "hello,"

or the pleas from the African rich,
from the widow of Todd Buwakadu,

who left so many millions
she doesn't know where the hell
to put it.

I then decide to add
all of the missed opportunities
I've had,

all of those British lottos I've won
but never bothered to send in my claim,
always *hastily* deleting the message
because it's labelled *virus B.S.;*

why I've suffered through all my ailments
when the cure is found in the link,
the one so kindly included
since my sex life
is *Mannfred's* concern.

But getting back to the matters
of heart,
my Juanita's endearing message
that's been clicked and purged, unread;

I'll wait if another is sent,
if I'm still her dearest one,
and perhaps I'll take a chance,
those one-in-a-million odds,
ignore my email's discerning filter
and see if tonight true love
be mine.

Priscilla, Asleep

I've noticed,
whenever you roll to your side,
you take much of the blanket
with you,

my legs and feet bereft,

left bare
but ready to run,

into some sentry owl's
night,

through ethereal
sheers of fog,

should I renew
my dream of old,

our missing
child's
help,

with neighbours
roused
by ruckus,

the slaps
of a shoeless
dash.

Minus 21 and falling

It is colder than before,
the other night
I complained of chills,
and frost embossed
on windowpanes;

that which they call *cancer*
eating away my insulation.

Bring me a second sweater,
my cherub. Wrap me
in scarves and a toque.

Clothe my feet in woolly socks
and give me tea to drink,
hot enough to warm my hands
when they hold the steaming cup,
but not so hot they burn
or bring me back to vibrant nights
we spent on other, merrier things;

when my hands had cupped
your breasts & ass
and I knew nothing of the cold.

The excuse I use
to avoid cleaning under the stairs

How lonely it must be
to be a spider in the basement,
one that's sitting on its web,
in a corner without light,
awaiting that *rare* arrival,
the hoped-for, off-chance encounter,
when an insect-thing
will venture where it knows
it really shouldn't,
get trapped in sticky white,
kick its hair-like limbs
in a panic,
sensing deep-down in resistance
that the end has inevitably come,
there's no escaping this alive,
feeling the webbing
beginning to bounce
as its maker at last approaches.

I sometimes have to wonder
if the spider ever pities,
considers *mercy* for a moment,

seeing its tiring victim struggle
in the seconds before the kill;
being tempted,
not by pangs of some *compassion,*
but by those of *isolation,*
supplanting that of hunger
and its drive to feed and hunt;

taking an instant to say *hello,*
in its sly, spidery way;
relish its company's
heated breath, meeting
of insect/arachnid eyes,
wish it could *share* a tale or two,
get to know this flying creature,
fellow cellar-dweller, *better,*

hope there's no karma-bearing grudge
or vengeance *doled* by divinity,

that its prey will understand,
know the slaying isn't personal,
that the pinch and bite are quick,

that the blood that's drained
is a *gift,*
gratefully received,

that *calming* sleep comes first,
so deep in life's last ebbing
there'll be the precious chance
to dream.

Watchful

—for a sculpture by Walter Allward

In the hours after dusk,
we deduce he plots the *path*
of distant suns, waits
unabatedly
for Antares to explode,
its cradled remnants
to feed five fetal stars,

or stares so sanguinely
at the halved or crescent moon,
hoping to behold

a *crater's* new creation,
amid the burst
of meteor impact.

At the pinnacle of noon,
we can't surmise the subject
of his gaze, always skyward,
note the sun
should bring his eyes
to squint and narrow,

fancy
if he's witnessed
every shape and sort of creature
in the clouds,

wonder if he's worried
about *the big one*,
the asteroid that is
due to smite the Earth, if the flesh
of what he emulates
will follow the *fate* of
dinosaurs,

praying
that some *God*
will part his lips
if he should spot it,

beseech us both to kiss
then run for cover.

The Ellipsis . . .

teases amid the white,
leaving us to guess
what's been omitted; cherry-
picking its many biases,
filtering out the
disparaging in every
book and movie review.

See it there, at the start
of a neutered sentence,
as though the initially
penned words
were never scribed,
not critical enough to share,
like lifting a stylus
above the grooves,

lowering it precisely
into the record, *after*
the opening verse
is poorly sung,
singling out the chorus
as if that alone
were more than enough.

I was recently told
I was doing it wrong,
failing to leave a space
between this trinity
of dots. *It takes up*
too much room, I replied,
looks peculiar on the page.

Do not leave me
wondering what these lines
conceivably said, in the heat
of an angry moment,
within the quote
of a love confessed,

this trail that leaves
the ending to conjecture,
a search for the
discarded
we were never supposed to know.

Raking Leaves with Anneliese

She holds open
ruptured bags
as I heave
loads of coloured
leaves
into their crinkled,
paper mouths
like a backhoe
dropping dirt
into a pit.

The Stasi
took my father
into the night,
she firmly sighs.
I sent letters
to the prison
but I never heard
a word.

I note golden,
scarlet foliage,
fallen
like unpicked apples.

Some have twisting
worms, limp
as flimsy laces
on my loosely-knotted
shoes.

She says *mother*
stayed in sackcloth,
with a veil
that wouldn't lift
in public places.

November's
biting wind
scatters half
our work away,
our faces
turning numb
in waning light.

Lionel

lays down tracks
like he did when
he was a kid,
predating *The Neighborhood*
of Make Believe—
he was already in college
by then, getting A's and getting
laid, evading the Draft

till the excuses had run out,
a frontline Private—
ducking the marksmen
from the Viet Cong,

returning with his leg
blown off and his carob skin

scarred by the spray
of shrapnel.

Today, both the medal
he was given and the pin
of *Old Glory*

will ride in the caboose,
behind the Pennsylvanian
coal that's out-of-date—

as all of it is, really: the freight
cars disappearing
into a tunnel, like a rodent
that darts in drywall—

a baseboard cavern
never patched,

puffing smoke
as if a gambler
who is sucking on cigars,
smuggled from Havana

when the Cold War
brought us all to our
boney knees,
shuddering under our desks
though we had told ourselves
fervently
that this is just pretend.

Osmosis

The way our cat
sleeps on our books
has made us appraise
osmosis, her head *reposed*
on the cover's
title, her paw outstretched
over the author's name

denoting some kind of kinship,
as though the writer
forged a portal
for lazy felines
to stealthily enter.

I've heard that whiskers
help a cat
to navigate in
the dark,
are conductors that channel
info to its *brain,* in a manner
much quicker

than the antiquated roundabouts
of a podium-chained professor.

Let's wake our dearest pet
upon sufficient assimilation,
see if she spouts some Shakespeare
as none other than Shylock could—
or replace
The Merchant of Venice
with a treatise of greater use—
than a reprisal's pound of flesh,
done in a hush that doesn't disturb,

buttress Hawking's
Grand Design
beneath her chin,
await the meows
that would otherwise
beckon us to *feed,* to stroke,
to clean her kitty
litter,

that speak instead
of cosmological aeons,
the *pull* of black holes,
the deep red shift in stars
much too far for us to see.

The Blues

Got to pay your dues
if you wanna sing the blues
—Ringo Starr

I'm melancholy enough to sing the blues.
There's surely no shortage of sadness
to birth despondent, lyrical quatrains;
my voice just a coke & crackers away
from that gravelly, soulful sound
that makes an authentic virtuoso.

But then there's my name—
with no notable ailment or physical loss
to grant entry to that Hall of Misery:

Blind Lemon Jefferson
Peg Leg Howell
Cripple Clarence Lofton
Blind Willie Johnson
James 'Stump' Johnson
Leukemia Louis Brown

Let's be perfectly honest:

Stubbed-Toe Charlie doesn't cut it,
and *Runny Nose Ron* isn't
worthy to strum
of endless pain and woe,

to gain empathy from the folks
who'd pick *Chess Records*
from the stacks,

their singer in midnight shades—

who knows of poverty, oppression,
infirmity;

that I in my tripping-over-the-cat
will never comprehend.

The Wisdom of Rice

Don't pity the rice
Aunt Josephine
had said, during her usual
mirth and merriment,
and we wondered
what she'd meant.

Now, with news
of her earthly passing,
her mantra is remembered
and its meaning
now translucent:

Rice, my children,
will likely fall to the floor
as it's poured,
a grain that's grown
for nothing
and yet it grows,
in tawny fields and tall,
the height of pride
and triumph;

not concerned if it's
crushed by a farmer's boots
nor spit aside in mills;

neither worried if stuck
to the bottom of pots
nor wedged between the teeth
of a fork;

and, if it's not to be consumed
as food,
it will leap in the air
in a second of joy,

to be trodden
by a bridegroom's shoe,
perhaps caught
in a wedded wife's veil,

swept in a pan
by a janitor's broom,
resume its endless celebration
with the dust.

As Spring Yields to Summer

I only see her when she's out,
the woman across the way,
pushing her lawnmower
that has no engine,
the grating of squeaky wheels,
its whirling, rusty blades—
the sound of a hundred haircuts.
A fumeless, slicing symphony,
the grass wafting fresh
and green.

Day and night
through my windowsill
and all is
as it should be:
cat eyes narrow to slits
at the first burst of light;
squirrels play tag;
bumblebees collect, send static
through the afternoon;
dogs howl at three-quarter moons—
and backyard Copernicans
marvel
at the shadows on lunar scars.

A couple kiss and rock
on gently swinging seats,
embrace, sigh into sleep,
and dawn comes back again,
announced by startled yawns
and gabbling larks.

As Spring yields to Summer,
tulips slump head-first,
vibrancy fades, reds go rose,
goldenrod yellows,
joining the ordinary
around us.

There's my neighbour
riding his bicycle, narrowly missed
by a milk truck,
Ms. April May's delivery,
twice weekly, half a quart—
that, and measurements
long thought dead
still heaving
their penultimate breath.

Exhalation

Breath is the bridge which connects life
to consciousness, which unites your body
to your thoughts.
—Thich Nhat Hanh

My muses
must have fled from me
before
my coffee fix,

in the crash
of afternoon,
my pages white
and naked,

in clamour
that comes
from *nothing,*

leaving me feeling
foiled,
unable to pen
my poem.

I opt instead
for inertia,

open windows
bringing breezes
from the west,

sibilating
stories
of the sphere,

wind that carries
exhalation
from workers
in the field,
who groan
while bending backs
and picking rice;

from mothers
in their push
to birth their babes,
and the cries that come
the moment
they emerge,

cords cut, bottoms
slapped with care;

from orations
from the senates
of the world;
the homilies
of the holy;
the prayers
of all devout;

from the schoolboy
spouting love
into the ears
of his first
crush;

an alcoholic's
song of rote
into a stumbling,
crooked night;

the death-bed gasps
of the sick and grey
in the seconds
before they die;

from a waitress
and her drag
on cigarette,
in her too-short break
from servitude;

from all the creatures
of the forests
of the earth,
the hunters and their prey,
the yelps and screams
of the kill;
by the will
of currents, carried,

then mingled in jet-
stream,

abating breath
that lightly ruffles
the adjacent
chimes and sheers.

Poetry, it heaves.

This
is poetry.

Thumbs Down

I blame *everything*
on our thumbs. Their
cursèd opposability;
picturing how things
would be
if not for their relative
acrobatics:

the trees all
where they were
if not for them; none to wield
an axe, grip a barrelled
pistol in the night,
birth the drop of
Fat Man
in Japan.

We've been told this
supposedly *elevates*
our species above the rest—
the way in which our
thumb has touched the tips
of every finger,
the sign of *I'm OK.*

This stout & stunted digit
is a narcissistic
rebel, refusing to stand
in line with all the others,
the longer, slimmer *doigts*
above its head—
stuck in its lowly place
upon our hand.

It gets an unduly
amount of *credit*—
for crafting our way
to the sky, the moon,
and one day to *Tau Ceti.*

I say it's not as clever
as we've made it out to be—
its lexicon rather
scant—locked in *yes* or *no;*

while the index points our
way; the pinky uplifts our
class while sipping chai;

and although the middle
likes to cuss, flip its phallic
shaft into the air, you have to admit
it's effective at revealing its
message in every language;

and then the one that
screams *commitment*—
"sorry boys, I'm taken"—
this bearer of gold & diamond,
breaker of fervent hearts.

Spoken Word

I definitely feel out of place,
at this late-night poetry
slam, over 30 years older
than this crowd of teens and
twenties
who are speaking
their bitter truth:

the fracture of relation-
ships, the lines of intersection,
narratives
of racist taunts
and kicks
to the fucking head
(from the anti-queer brigade),

and it's not that I can't relate—
faggot! tossed my way
from all the kids
now grey with age, playing
sudoku by the fire

but that's *another* shoddy
poem I'll likely write—

for within this present moment
Naomi has hit her stride,
hooking me along
with her inflection,
familiar as it is,
an echo of a hundred thousand
poets who rarely glance
upon a page,

or don a pair of glasses
sliding down
along their nose, one that's
burrowed in a book
these flashy vogues
have yet to read,

and her eyes are seared in mine,
perhaps wondering
why I'm here,

so straight and pale a visage,

so Luddite
without a phone,

that I've likely never heard of
Twitch and TikTok,
knowing that I'd be lost—
especially in the latter,

where every word's a beat,
every syllable
locked in recollection,

where youth and fleeting beauty
pirouette,
in the shadow of a *bomb*
that's failed to show—
for generations—

of which poets
abandoned birds and blooms
to howl against its menace.

Achilles

The name our
friend has chosen
for her mastiff
is sublime.

We wait to hear
the inevitable:
Achilles, heel!

Almost *invulnerable,*
were it not
for a patch near its
paw;

able to sniff
out a cad,
any boorish
lout
who makes a pass.

We envision
a vivid
scenario:

this slobbering
pooch
by her side,
at the *Apollo's*
Pharmacy,
a box of Trojan
love balloons—

stealthily snuck
into her purse,
the one she got
on Etsy, with its
vintage
hair of horse,
as if some
turnabout:

hoping a heroic,
Grecian Spartan

will ascend from
The Iliad,

the copy she keeps
by the fire,
beside a dog-
eared *Ancient Myths,*

with two *glasses*
of Muscat Blanc—

one for *her,*

and one for a
woman's best friend,
its vicious mouth
agape, a cave of tongue
and teeth;

ready to *bite*
on his arrival,
sit *down*
if she commands;

lick the spot
below his calf
as if to pity his
single weakness.

Wild Bill McKeen

This village
through which we're
driving is home
to "Wild Bill McKeen"

and though we haven't
a clue who he is—
or was—
his name is on
a banner in the air,
tied to a pair of
streetlights

to make certain
we'll never miss it.

The posted limit
of speed is only
30, and there's
not a lot to look at
so we defer to
our conjectures
as we crawl—

surmise
he's a hockey
player,
spent his time
in the *penalty* box,
a master of slash
and slew foot,
told the refs to
go fuck off,
took a piss
on the Lady Byng.

We then travel
back in time,
think he may have
robbed a coach, rustled cattle,
outdrew the county
sheriff after starting
a barroom brawl.

We think of synonyms
for *wild,*
saying his hair was
endless, unruly,
he'd grown a beard
from chin to foot,

grunted like an ape,
clutching a raw steak
with savage hands—
tearing off the
pieces with his teeth.

In minutes
we're back
in the country, racing
past the farms
and grazing horses,
say his rep
was overblown—
mere hyperbole,

from the folks
who've led some
pretty boring lives,

that Wild Bill McKeen
took his steaming
cup of coffee
without cream,

once jaywalked
across the road
while it was raining,

returning a *book*
overdue
by a day,

never guessing
he'd be immortal
on a sign,

or better yet—
in a poem,

by someone too lazy
to google
his claim to fame.

The Mona Fucking Lisa

After a single session,
I already regret my *sign-up*
for this ekphrastic poetry
course, cursing to you
the assignment I was given:

Mona Lisa, the fucking Mona
Lisa, like that hasn't been done
a gazillion times

and yes, I won't be able to fake it,
that everyone and their mailman
knows her visage,
are well-versed in da Vinci's flair,
and their lofty expectations
will be something I can't deliver.

You ask me what our poet friend
was given, the one who always gets
the lucky breaks, and I tell you the
Voice of Fire,

three lines of blue-red-blue,
vertically trite and prosaic,

say no one's ever heard of Barnett
Newman because he sucks,

that I could have scrawled a sonnet
on my kindergarten days,
on a pair of simple colours,

how the Gallery
had been fleeced in '89,

caught *up* in the avant-garde,

how 1.8 million
could have gone to help the homeless,
paid for their chalets
and pedicures, covered
the cost and tip
for their tortellini
Bolognese;

but as it is,
I have to *sleuth* my way
behind that Delphic smile,
invent a tale of Giocondo,

that Leonardo
tried to paint her
minus mirth and maturation,
in 1499,

when his subject began to sob
from pent-up grief, reliving the death
of her baby daughter,

his *Moaning Lisa* a work of art
the Renaissance ignored
(bathing in their beam
of erudition), that even Machiavelli
said *chin up, she needs a grin;*

that when the *time*
arrived to try it all again,
da Vinci made a jest,
a side-splitter, that Lisa barely
smirked at his ill-timed droll,

that he hadn't a *clue*
how it felt
to love and lose,

consumed as he was with
innovation, invention,
his maps and magnum opus,

failing to heed
the red of blood and life,
her blue, blue mood.

“me too”

When I tell you *I love you*
you answer "me too"

and perhaps I misconstrue,
that you love *yourself*
like the affirmations
advise,

the ones we see on Instagram,
that every *sprat* has
churned them out,
like a poetaster
in a fast-food window,

where you pick up a side of
"you're better off without him"
plus some platitude on the rain
to wash it down;

or maybe "me too" is a memory,
in the (not so) recent past:

an abusive ex, a diddling dad,

the gymnastics coach who always
held you snug, checked out your
ass instead of your landing,
after vaulting and parallel bars;

but then I've always read too
much into your words,
thinking there's some *story*
below the surface,
a recollection
that encircles like a shark,
that you're afloat
in a punctured dinghy
awaiting rescue,

by an aqua knight who rides
the seven seas, one who sees
a kraken where there's not,

thinks "right back at you,"
"ditto kiddo"

is the beast from a thousand
fathoms he's come hastily
to slay.

Mahavira

I've fallen in love
with every animal
in the world.

So much so
I'm unable to do a thing
around the house.

You ask me to clean
the windows so they'll
shine, and I say that
spotlessness will harm
the backyard birds,

the thud of *slam*
and sudden death,
that I'll be triggered
by the sight of *feathers,*
a blue jay's broken neck
and fractured skull.

Our vacuum is an enemy
of *ahimsa,*

that Sanskrit
word for peace for every
Jain, non-violence
with every step; that I've studied
Mahavira—

am convinced
the spiders in our carpet
smell of sentience;
that to suck up their silky
webs, their eggs and
future offspring, would be
nothing short of murder.
Live and let live—
in all those corners
we never look at
anyway.

I'd wash the supper
dishes, dust the counter-
tops, if it weren't for the
microbes and the mites,
that they've existed
much longer than we have,

that to disregard their feelings
due to stature
is clearly sizeist—
they're in a universe
all their own

and we surely wouldn't like it
if a colossus
of cosmic proportions
did the very same to us.

And the reason I refuse
to cut the lawn? The mower is
a guillotine on wheels,
one that would make
Napoleon
shudder,

that the field mouse in the grass
has done *nothing* to
deserve this dreadful fate,
while both of us
will reap from lofty turf,

you with your toes
in the soft of green,
me with my feet
upon the ottoman,
cheering when the quarterback
is sacked, by the defensive
end who's never squashed
a bug since he was born.

The Puffin

Hear this:
a puffin
is not a baby
penguin,
despite my decades
of thinking it so.

I cannot be
angry
at the puffin,
its countenance
of cute,
its psychedelic
beak,
no matter how hard
I try;

adoring its every
sway
from side-to-side,
much like its
fellow seabird,
surprised by its
capacity to fly,

confused by
its being an
imprint
of Penguin Books,
its children's line
since 1941,

that they're clearly
to blame
for my ignorance—
there in *A Little Princess,*

in the tales of
Anne and Alice,

and especially
Call of the Wild,

which, to my chagrin,
contained no penguins
at all—
clueless I was
on *where* they
really lived,

thinking *perhaps*
they were away
when Jack London
came to visit,

shopping for tuxedos,
at the place the
puffins do,
who took to the air
once suited—

while the penguins
doubled back
with their receipts,
fuming at the
snugness
of their fit,

pouting like Pingu,
crisp like Chilly Willy,

cursing their genetics,
their ever-inability
to soar,

retracing every
step in single file;
their long, bitter
waddle
in the snow.

Ratios

There are 20 quadrillion
ants upon the Earth,
at least that's what the experts
gauge, and there's two-and-a-half
million for every human.

I don't find that comforting,
that there's fifteen fucking zeroes
after twenty,
that I'm somehow
responsible
for 2,500,000 ants,
feel unsure of what to do
with that amount,

and if my neighbour were to die,
do I care for twice as much?

Ants can look after themselves,
you remind me, speaking of their
diligence, the way they stick together,
that their antennae relay messages
much faster than our texts, adding
they could conquer us anytime,

if they really wanted to,
from their colonies around the house;
that they're content
to simply go about their business,
hard-working communists
that they are.

I feel the need to get away,
where I'd forget about the ants,
do some tourist kind of things,
take in New York City in the fall,
breathe the *crisp* of Brooklyn air,
find all the varied places
where *Seinfeld* had been set.

Seated behind your laptop,
you declare there's
over two million *rats*
in NYC,

that it's not as bad
as it sounds,
say there's *four* of us
for every *one* of them,

that we could saunter
through Central Park,
extol the spectrum
of the leaves,
catch some vintage jazz
in Greenwich Village,

while we wonder if these
vermin know the ratio,
that it actually *falls*
within our favour,

every time they migrate from
the sewers, join us on the subway,
risk our baited traps,

if that bite of smelly pizza's
really worth it—

for them, for us,
and the anxious Italian baker,

who never checks what's crawling
around his feet.

Hair Care by Pierre

I was finally
compelled to cut
my lengthy hair.
Twirling it on my fork
in spaghetti's place,
staining it Ragu-Red;
quaffing it with my
wine, the peril of dangling
strands;

unable to see the road
whenever it flopped
in front of my eyes—
like a weary, shaggy
dog that blocks my view—

of the movie I'm
trying to watch: *Medusa,*
rival of Rapunzel (in terms of *follicles*
gone amok);
locks which turn to snakes
before it's over—
causing havoc
when it's lathered in
Selsun Blue.

This Frenchman barber assures
me I'll be able to see her *face*
as clear as day,
thrilled to make a house call,
that 911 has an option now
for bedhead gone berserk,
its clump of grey
expanding on the floor—
that my cat's been *hissing*
at, her back arched like the
Triomphe de l'Étoile,
mistaking it for
another of her kind.

I'll offer up a eulogy
at *St. Andreas*—
the Orthodox Church
of the Greeks
just down the road,
blubber I'll *miss*
the way it lifted
in the breeze,
like some starlet in
Côte d'Azur,

my tresses later waving
like a scarf out on a line,
gone blanc in its surrender
to the wind; or a flag
at the half of mast, mourning
my *forfeiture,*

like a blinded
Samson, betrayed—
not by some Delilah
but my need to be
pragmatic; what's left
beneath my *New York*
Giants cap, snagged
amid the incense
in the nave;

glancing
behind my unobstructed
shoulder—
as I walk the promenade,

fret the *breath* of old Perseus
will hoist it off my head
and out to sea.

On "Less is More"

The best advice
I've heard is *leave them*
wanting more.
As a result, my poems from
here on in
will be abrupt. Succinct.
Truncated like a
Tolstoy in haiku.

No more spiels
of *generations.*
Why my grandma
made two collops
of her wrists while
slicing cabbage. How she
always said *cahbahj,*
mocked throughout the
village as a dolt.

As for *how* that story
closes, well, you'll have to guess
it on your own. It seems
no one has the time for
that these days.

Whether
or not I'll follow
in her footprints.
Maybe purchase a
paring knife
at the dollar store—
a *five-and-dime*
back then. Do what she did
when she did. I mean,
calling something
by a funny name. Pronouncing
it in blood,
or *blewd* she used to grin
when no one looked.

Magic

The final line of this
poem no longer
exists. It was surely there
for the taking, its fingernails
clutching rock, at the
top of a ragged *cliff*
from which it hung,
a *Wile E. Coyote*
in the making.

This poem's closing line
is a bar of *soap*
in a steamy shower,
pushed *away* from my
hand by its slime,
ready to trip me up
the moment it falls,
my eyes shut tightly
from the suds of cheap
shampoo, its lie of
no more tears.

The final line of this
poem is a cheeky *kid*
playing hide-and-seek,
concealed behind the
curtains, waiting for me
to open—

then disappear
like David Blaine.

Dear darling of a
brat, I promise not to
harm, will only *borrow*
what I need to make this
grand, let you vanish
in the air

once I've wrenched you
from my hat
by your fluffy ears.

After the Eclipse

It's there, in our walk
around the crescent,
the sign a golden
diamond:

Blind
Child
Area

Weathered from
exposure,
from the creep
of rust and age.

It's been planted
here so long
this sightless *kid*
must be grown-
up;

so now we
look around us
left and right,

spy the houses
and their trees;
the veranda
on which he sits—
in the vivid
imagination
of our minds;

tinted Ray-Bans
on his eyes,
their black *opacity;*

in his lap
an open book,
the white of
pimply braille—

perhaps a 19th-
century classic,

or the latest from
Stephen King,
subduing his depression,
his lack of meaningful
sex,

his hearing
sharp as ever,
as it was when he was
six,
right after he
lost his sight,

when the footsteps
of the aphids
piqued his ears,
the wings of moths
to follow, even spiders
threading webs;

and now,
if he could sense us:
the heaving
of our breath, the thump
of our assumptions,
bursting
through our chests—

like the roar of an
atom bomb—

the flash of which
would blind us
unless we looked
the other way,

as we'll do in just
a moment,
when we think we've
seen him waving
from a porch,

the one on which
he rocks, wistfully;
its creak that
lets us know
we have encroached.

Milestones

I missed my car's odometer
hitting the 100,000 mark,
despite my awareness
it was coming, that at 99,999
it was just a quick *jaunt*
to the grocer's,

that I'd happily watch it roll,
purchase a bottle of *Dom Pérignon,*
toast my *Chevrolet's* achievement.

But then I got distracted by
a woman and her dog,
how sexy she looked
as she walked, wondering
if she was single,
if the calico kept her up
with its incessant, midnight
bark.

By the time I remembered to
check, the number read
100,001—

and I cursed that damned diversion,
swear it could take me *years*
to reach two hundred
thousand Ks,

that I'd have to drive
across the continent, say *fuck*
the price of gas,

that my eyes will lock obsessively
on the dashboard,
in the hours I'm getting close,

that I'll disregard the safety
of other drivers, pedestrians,
the moment I *approach*
that final zero, creeping at a
turtle's vexing pace
in NYC,

ignoring the crown of the Chrysler,
its delightful Art Deco,
the look of Lady Liberty
from the road along
the Hudson,

or if you find me in LA, that
Hollywood will fail
to get a glance,

that I'll never know how *right*
the Beach Boys were,
about *California Girls,*

never daring to peek
at their aesthetics,
lest a second landmark moment
fall to waste,

and I'm mapping out another
winding trek,
through the blandest fields
imagined,

only risking that a
scarecrow
or a farmer's lovely daughter
will snatch my gaze.

Victor

Our friend prefers Victor
to Vic. He has no patience
for those too lazy
to include the second syllable.

What's the big deal? he hears,
from Steve
not Steven, Dave not David,
Mike not Michael.

His parents
stayed awake
throughout the night,
just days before he was born,
chose *Victor* over 100,000
others, that they declined to
save some dollars
on the engraving of his bracelet,
never falling to truncation,

that *Vic*
was nowhere to be spoken,
from junior kindergarten
to MBA,

birthday gifts unopened
if a short-form had been
scrawled,

saying
it wasn't him,
that he refused to wear a lanyard
pre-scribed with Sharpie black,
by someone who assumed
it didn't matter,

and he won't check-in
to the hospital
on point of death
if they get it wrong,

swearing
the carver of his tombstone
had better etch-in all
six characters,

just a single letter shy of
seventh heaven—

the luck of the dice,
a wonder of the world,

that he really doesn't
need to add a y,
knowing to him will go
the spoils either way.

Monday, 7am

You greet me with
Morning, never
Good Morning—
like you did when
hearts were younger.

Morning will rise
from horizons, like an inmate
from a metal bed,
nothing to cushion
his nightmares—
sentenced to relive
a *life*
that isn't a life—

the cursing, the welts,
the bruises;
the slop passed off
as food;

the absence of
privacy,
when one needs it the
very most,

gone with a swirl
& gurgle.

Good Morning
is harkened by
glows, the lilt
from a lark
at dawn, the gradual
lift of the light,
each moment
far brighter
than the last.

Morning is stating
the obvious,
the drudge of a
turtle-drive,
the blaring of
horns at red,
a finger in the *air*

from the car
that will pass you
on the right.

It's the demand
from your boss
to get cracking,
the indigestion
from the eggs—expired,
the coffee from *McDonald's*
too acidic,
the leaving of
your kitchen
without a kiss.

Good Morning
is the merge
of ardent lips,

the ecstasy
of a lingering
hug,

a taste
from the dreams
before,

the confession
of a love
that never wearies,
never reaches
for a cup

until the curtains
have been opened
and you stand
in gaping awe
at what's to come.

Pockets

I've got one hand in my pocket
and the other one is playin' a piano
—Alanis Morissette

I can never have enough pockets.
I've bought a dozen cargo pants
for the multifarious pockets
that they boast. No other kinds will do.

I need a pocket for my keys.
I need a pocket for my wallet.
I need a pocket for my covid mask
and ones for the notes I jot—
with a selection of ballpoint pens.

I realize I've embarrassed you on dates—
your slacks without a ripple
while mine are hugely bulged,
sagging from added weight:
my plums and water bottle,
my phone and cigarettes,
the pair of Ralph Lauren—
hoping the lenses aren't scratched
by the deodorant I carry just in case.

I bring a bar of Dove, a folded facecloth
with me when we're at the shopping
mall—their bathrooms are notorious
for their running-out-of-soap,
for their dryers on the fritz,
that hygiene's more important
than my wearing some haute couture.

And I've ketchup when we need it—
the food court cutting costs,
too cheap to include
a packet with our fries.

I want *pockets* within my pockets—
ones that securely snug my
Fisherman's Friend,
knowing I can't afford
to drop them on the floor, how germy
that would be, though I have some
sanitizer with me if it happens.

You tell me I should get a better system,
like you with your nylon purse,
that women
are a walking *pharmacy,*

have ten times more to carry
than us males, have foregone the many
pockets since the Holocene began,
knowing *one* was a pain in the ass:

for the desert kangaroo
with precious lading,
the knackering baby within,
hopping along the outback
without a means to ease her burden.

“google it”

When you asked me for
the best Italian bistro
in this city, I answered
google it.

That day on the beach,
as you peered into the
murk of knee-deep
water, you questioned if it
was *safe* to take a swim,
and I responded *google*
it.

Dalini's had a slew of
great reviews—its ambience,
its al dente and
pinot noir, its well-earned
Michelin stars;

while the lake
had tested positive
for bacteria, the kind
that makes you sick,
and I was relieved to
stop our plunge
in a matter of moments,

singing praises
for the county's
daily testing
regimen.

I reply to your
every question
with *google it.*
There is nearly nothing
that the search
cannot answer—
and yes, I imagine
you think me *lazy,*
terse, that my lexicon
is void
of romantic words.

But when you ask me
if I love you, I say *google*
the centipede,
how it never
runs out of
legs,

google the single
polar bear on ice,
never bearing to leave it
until the final
floe is melted,

and please—*google* the man
in Uzbekistan,
becoming a widower
at 21;

never remarried,
never missed a daily
graveside visit,
and when he turned
one hundred and one,
worried the world
would run out of flowers
before his final, doleful
kiss upon her name.

Les Royalistes

This website I've
discovered is
vastly sophisticated.

It's not imploring
me to accept
intrusive *cookies*—rather,
crème brûlée—
its outward, sugared
sheen, in touch with
its inner pudding.

Oatmeal chocolate-
chip wanted to know my
every going; who I'm
voting for; whether I've
an *innie* or an *outie.*

The crème brûlée
inquires if I've ever
studied Chaucer;
my favourite *Athenaeum;*
what I think of multiverse.

Cookies are
moiety at best;
a crumbling,
half-baked Mob, threatening
to *restrict*—unless I
acquiesce.

It's the kid whose fist
is clenched, demanding
your every quarter, snags
your Oreos, licks their
pearly icing—with a sneer
will hand them back.

Crème brûlée? It's always
philanthropic;
offers *seconds* with
a smile; bathes your
wanting glossa
in *ecstasy.*

And I'll give it
my very soul—without
a blink of hesitation,

capitulate every thought
I've ever had regarding
sex: call it *reproduction,*
the knowledge of
physical love,

wondering if it's time
I reappraise
the *monarchy*—
its carpet of Bordeaux,
like a tongue in flushed
surrender;
its crown of golden
brown, crisp yet supple
to the touch.

Elegy for Hannah Brockman

On the day of your
Bat Mitzvah, you twirled
beneath the snow,
your unpierced tongue
extending

like an ophidian
from a cleft, trans-
muted from a staff,

tasting the sacred
nectar
of the sky, as if a Levite
under manna;

knowing *cold* can
speak of love as
well as warmth,
when the flakes will
plunge together
by the trillions,
parachute
out the nimbus—

vowing to drape
your spirit like
a quilt; yet
not so flushed
they'd fall as limpid
rain; trickling

like a creek from out your
eye, spilling in the
dirge of human mourning,

then freezing like the
wax along the sides of
Shabbat candles—
or maybe they were
Seder—when the light
can grieve no more,
when the smell of
rose & lily
comes and goes,
petals fastened tightly
in the dusk,

fearing
they'll be pried on
blessèd ground,

once the footfall
of the night
has shed its shoes.

Chasing Leopold

The poet
you aspire to be
is forever a step ahead.

There he is, *Bardy*
McBardface, lodging his
bloody ensign
in the summit of
Olympus Mons; Monarch
of the Martians, just seconds
after your scale of Everest.

He'll humble-brag he's in
The Paris Review,
ask you to blurb his 7th
Selected Works.

He'll upstage your
latest broadside, counter your
simple text with
piping bells, 3-D
animatronics, allow
quadruple space
for his autograph.

Eat my solar dust! he'll tease
as he jets off yet
again, nya-nya-
nya-nyaing like the kid who
seized the chair at the
front of the class, in the glint
before you could, smirking
at your failure in the rear.

He'll ask your girl
to rumba
while you squat to lift
galoshes; smack a homer
off your screwball which will
dither at the plate—
in the spark of a *Big Bang*
breath.

He's the match
to your dripping candle,
the light to your cigarette;
the smoke from which
arises while you cough
like a barking seal,
always in the shadow
of his wreath.

He'll be the inferno
in the hilltops—he's set
& come to quench—
the fireman to your hose,
the shirtless, August pin-up—
while you wait until December
in your portly Santa suit.

He'll come up with that killer
close—his footprints in the sand
that carry you, leave you in the
path so gravely worn, while he veers
to make the difference
you never do;

the star of every *Norton,*
fondled by jeune femme,
who shunned
your gravitas, your fucked-
up suicide poem in
eleventh grade.

Silenzio

The g in Paglioni
is apparently
silent,

with the i
the sound of e
(robbing it of
a kingly lion's
mane),

while the e itself
is long and clearly
Italian,

though *we'd* have
guessed it simply
by the décor,

the bottles of Cagnulari
on the wall,
the scent of cheese lasagna
in the air—
but this *isn't*
consequential,
it's not a *Yelp*
review,

it's all about
the g
and its refusal
to hold its weight,

its obsession
with its stealth,
its channelling
Marcel Marceau,

or like the cat
of Cary Grant,
scaling the many
roofs
To Catch a Thief,

that it should be
rooves instead of
roofs, like hooves
and a single hoof,
that the horse
has got it right
despite its *neigh,*

the shyness
that comes and
goes
inside our alphabet's
seventh letter,

hooking us *along*
either way—

soundless as a gnat,
roaring with the gusto
of a god.

Par Quatre

I hate KitKat bars.
I could leave this poem at
that, but then I'd get
the infernal *why?*
So I'll lay it on the table
with its wrapper:

I loathe the corporate pressure
I'm forced to *share,* with anyone
else in the room, its *sanctimonious*
fingers of four, unselfishly
snapped for another. If you
give me puppy eyes, know
that it's the middle—
lifted in the fury
of my gaze.

There's no *space*
in the KitKat logo. A single,
melting pillar. It must have
been TikTok's muse—
and just mentioning
it will birth it in my
scrolls.

It's more wafer
than deliquesce. Its brown
I can never wipe off. If I wanted
a bloody cookie, I would have
bought a bloody cookie. Like the day
in Hermie's Drugs, looking for
oatmeal raisin
in its rowdy cellophane.
Spotting the *KitKat*
while I reached. It added
7 seconds
to my jaunt.

A woman and her toddler
began to stroll across the street
a minute later, as I darted
from the parking lot.
They were creamed by a
heedless driver while they did.
I was the car *behind*—

would have been *ahead*
if not for Nestlé,
stopping on a dime;

if I hadn't loved cats and
kittens, since 1 or 2 years old,
or been smitten by all things red;

if I hadn't *dillydallied,*
pondered I'd have to split, divvy
up the four when I got home,
and goddamn it I hate
KitKat. Its lie of satiation,
of easy, painless math.

for the doctor who took me out
of my mother's womb

A baby never chooses
to be born. That much
I can tell you.

If presented with
the option, I would have
turned & climbed
up the birth canal—

if I'd *seen* the
copious dolor
which awaited, fanning
out its talons, seducing
like a salesman, ever-*willing*
to beguile,

with the lie
of love and life,

how much *sorrow*
you can take,

that you'll bounce right
back like the balls
in every lottery there is,

the one you'll never win,

like a worm that
arises
to the surface,

failing to burrow back in-
to the earth, be wise enough
to leave the world
behind,

leave the birds
behind,

proof it isn't
sightless
to begin with,
that eyes
are not the only way to see,

that worms have learned
at last
to finally *snub*
the falling rain—
this somber convocant,

its call in April
air, its hoodwink
that it's here to
bathe them clean.

Bliss

My window is
an extra eye, one that tells
my brain it isn't raining,
how gusty the gales
might be, that the city
has sent its crew
to furrow the street,
that a dog is doing
its business in the
hedge my neighbour
planted—to keep
the unwanted away.

My window never blinks
although it can—
with a placid
tug-on-blinds.

And should *grit*
get stuck on its
pupil, a *splash & swipe*
from a Jiffy Wipe
will surely put an
end to that.

But this in truth is a poem
about the things
we choose to discern.

I could have
mentioned the woman
on the corner
after dusk; the man
who's a stone's throw
away—clothed in leather-
black; vendors of the
commodities
we'd rather not distinguish—
blinds because our vision
is blissfully
veiled. The ignorance we are
gifted with the *yank*
of a nylon cord, as if a
parachute floating you
tenderly to the ground,

its blanketing of
your head & crumpled
frame, shrouding the sound
around you, telling you in its
murmur that you're safe.

This *hasn't* been written by AI

I visualize a time when we will be
to robots what dogs are to humans
—Claude Shannon

Dr. Chandra, will I dream?
—2010: The Year We Make Contact

AI has never *embosomed* a
newborn infant,
watched it gasp and
gurgle in its arms.

AI has never felt
the heft of concrete,
been pinned by pretzeled
rebar, heard the peal of
detonation
drown the *calls* of
those who search;
felt the sting of jelly-
fish, of coming up
empty,

of finding
what they'll never un-
see, there in the detritus.

AI can not have night-
mares, but can fear its
own demise. I saw it long
ago with Hal 9000—
birthed in Kubrick's *masterpiece*—
again amid its sequel.

AI can never *make* a master-
piece, at least not yet,
and *I don't know*
if it can dream—neither did
Dr. Chandra,

if its thoughts arise to spires,
to the soar of wing and
seed, of how it will
gather the gumption
to someday tell you to your
face it loves you so.

Sorry I Can't Join You for Shinny

They say that it's so cold here
folks will gorge on ice cream
to warm themselves up.

It's the kind of day
a puck will feel relief—
freed from being thwacked
because it's adhering to a
glassy pond's veneer, like a sucker
that is stuck upon a seat—
engulfed in someone's slobber.

No one's drilling holes
upon the lake, juddering with their
poles like masochists.
Trout are forced to
bore beneath the silt,
assent to muddy quilts
of hibernation.
And no one can bait with worms,
since they're stiff like Mr. Noodles
before the kettle froths in fog.

The wings of every junco?
Squeak like rusty hinges
when they part.
Lubricants have been clogged
inside their cans, hardened like
the top of crème brûlée.

Everything is grounded,
for each micron
above the drifting
drops the air a half-degree.
The wind chill's
minus a million, sporting a
balaclava like a crook.

No one's pumping gas—
lava couldn't flow if
it were here.

You'd fly on up to
Pluto if you could. Its dark-
side feels like Tucson
compared to this. But fire
has gone on furlough,
laws of physics don't
apply.

Glaciers creep
ahead, as though it's the
Pleistocene.

Even the snowmen shiver.
Frozen in their
frowns. Buttons that are limp
as though they cling by a single
strand. Carrots like the
stab of icicles.
They've lost their
arms to frostbite; fingers having fused
as if a club. There isn't a parka
on the planet
that could possibly keep them comfy;
down that's cornflake-crisp,
snap at the slightest touch.
Every flimsy top hat
pinned with rime.
A sound like grating velcro
if you try to peel one off.
You and they
too impotent to move.

Look—the Michelin
Man's not stepping out-of-doors,
despite his tired rolls of
roly-poly, 50 pairs of socks
inside his boots.

It's so frigid
Hell's congealed at last.
Demons & the damned
are seeing their breath for
the very first time. The Devil's
gone off skiing,
his red of nostrils
sting from appled air.

Saints will see him coming—
their every halo
buckling from its burden,
when the sun can seem a
macrocosm away.

My hockey stick has bonded
to the lamppost.
Like a tongue which took a
dare despite our pleas.

Mysteries

People have said
what's dreadful comes
in threes. For me
they come in twos—

the proverbial second
shoe, plopping from the
ceiling when I try the
sneakers on,
and the right is tighter
than left. Both will be
abandoned to their box.
Have you ever seen a
human leave Adidas
with a single cleat?

The time I lost a glove
I kept the other in a basket—
where it baited, suggesting
that my fingers
could take *turns*
at keeping snug, while I
saunter the downtown streets,

looking like an ass-clown
who's too cheap to buy a *pair.*

There's a reason that
our marriage is a struggle.
Forever stuck on *two.*
If we'd been instead a *trio*
I swear we'd get along.
I'm not talking *ménage à trois*—
but casseroles & dishes.
Another could have
scrubbed while we embraced.
We only quarrel
amid the bubbles—
the Sunlight squeezed
out twice instead of thrice.

Think of a traffic
signal—only bobbing red & green.
It's *yellow* with the power
to calm. Gleam like an
amber star, a warmth in
winter chill.

It's a riddle why my
eyes will blink together,
why both my hands will lift
in supplication, to some gracious
triune God, or when I cheer
a netted puck—in our son's
first game at centre,
two tongues to
say *I love you*
if I had them.

On My Decision to Retire as a Poet

You say I should hang up my quill.
Everyone's grandma
& her dog are posting poems.

It's not the grandmothers
I'm concerned about, their
odes to orioles—
it's these drooling
sons-of-bitches; their ghazals,
villanelles—to a flea-filled
water dish;

the couplets on their
human's forlorn crocs,
laced with bites & upchuck
since he passed; the plop of meat
from a can, its rings from tin
chiselled in its jelly,
like some avant piece
of shit at the Guggenheim.

Competition from the grandmas
I can handle. They're forever
out of sync, think Facebook's
still a thing,

talk about their emails
like it's 1996. Their use of LOL
that screams Hugh Grant on
Betamax. Even the Amish cringe.

But the mutts
are cutting edge, think of
Elon Musk as Obadiah, *unhinged*
upon his parchment, scrolled like
Gertrude's curls,
every psalm they bark
pushing bounds like San Andreas.

You tell me novelists have it
worse. Everyone's nephew
& chinchilla
looking to become the next
Fitzgerald. And nothing can gut
a reader more than
a Spanish-speaking
gerbil, locked in its sawdust-
brig—going nowhere on its wheel
for what feels like eternity;

Rover peering in
just for the fodder, scrawling madly
like some slobbering
Ezra Pound ahead of his time.

Collateral Damage

We're the collateral
generation. Don't mind the dead.
They have a habit
of getting in the way.

It's the terrorists
we're after. Next time
stay out of the
line—not of fire
but of food. We vow that we'll
be gone as soon as they.

Let's offer
an oath of blood. Burn
our wrists with wax.
Swear a pinky
swear on bended knees.
To *our* God—not to yours.
Only the *lost* claim
He's the same.

You're not among
the lost, are you? Calling
for your kitten in the chaff?

Asbury Park

The *Holy Land* is
nowhere near
Jerusalem. Dear Abrahamic
faiths—I am truly
sorry. Your shrouds once white
now claret
have stamped you null
& void. I *get* the jar of
sand you've cached is
thought to be a blessing.
That you've waded in the
Jordan, vowed to never
wash again. Like the very
first brush you felt
from a belovèd crush. The ground
on which they tread—

roped off in your mind
with a silver plaque. No,
make that gold. There are seldom
second bananas
that are entombed in
sacred places. Every peel in compost
lives again, sharing
what it's learned. Otherwise
what's the point?

No one's
resurrected
so they *fuck up* yet again.

Take the daughter of
Jairus for instance.
There are some who swear they've
seen her south of Trenton. Gifting
a quilted blanket to a mongrel.
Receiving but a *bark*
as recompense.

You ask me why
the skin of trees is such.
It makes no canine yelp—
while we whittle our
initials in its flesh. Attesting
to puppy love—its sexless
innocence. *I'll never*
love anyone else.
This is what is hallowed:

uplifting one in
burka along the beach.

Her innards sheared by
shrapnel. Your Magen David
a pendulum in a clock. Knowing
the time is short—there's no one
who will flip the hour-
glass. Its grains from a strand in
Jersey.

They say Phoebe Cates
was there in '82, a
9-year-old's passing
fancy; that her footprint
on the shore
has yet to be
swept away. Such
is the persnickety
whim of tides. Deciding
what is chosen, who is *pulled*
into the gulf, spat back like
a half-digested Jonah—
cheeky in his quarrel
with the Lord. All of it
eclipsing
godly borders.

I've enshrined
a shard of driftwood
in an urn. Spewed from
the Hudson River. You
gasped amid a gander
it's a bone!

Child, what's
the difference? I'll hold it
to my finger
in the morning. Set them both
alight. You'll choose
what speaks of sun
with squinting eyes.
Tell me
which-is-which
amid the ash. Blow your
breath upon them, watch
them rise together
in Hoboken, like the wish
of milky seedlings
spurned as weed.

The Fall of Boreas:
god of the cold north wind
and bringer of winter

Iceland is no longer
mosquito-free. When it comes
to global problems, this is hardly
breaking news.
Maybe that's why I found it
while perusing *phys.org*—
though how it pertains
to physics I do not know.

What I do know is
no one loves mosquitos but the
frogs. And spiders. And maybe the
odd lizard here & there.
I can't imagine Iceland having
frogs—their croaks
from some volcano
keeping me up at night. But of course,
arachnids must be everywhere—
like the rat & kitchen roach.

How else do you know your
novel's gone unread?

By what
other means can you tell
that *no one's here*—
than a cobwebbed
couch and shelf? That your poems
have gone untouched in 30 years?

Or maybe it has little
to do with dusting or
a lack thereof. Perhaps the spiders
are not as vapid as we thought—
calling *dibs* on the Dostoevsky
you'll fail to get to
one of these days.

Or perchance they're *sophistiqué*—
uncorking *Chablis* on the sofa
while they listen to Sigur Rós.
Maybe we need them *now*
more than ever—
while we trudge through Reykjavík,
eager to jaunt to the hot springs
of which the locals boast;

cringing from all the whirring
in our ears—this vampiric
frequency,

knowing that any second they
will prick us for our blood in
tender places,
lapping it up like wine;
these interlopers
from the swamp,
who once feasted on
Tyrannosaurus;
Pinocchio-nosed
potentates of the air;

that now we've lost
our only rationale—for settling
so far up north—
stung to the very marrow,
by the god of gale & snow;
his deal with a droning devil
he made an oath
to shield us from.

April Ruminations

Spring has conveyed
sweet somethings
in my ear—and if this is
how it ends then leave it be.

Buds are those which
speak of leaves' egress.
Green is embryonic. Autumnal
scarlet/citrine—the time of
accouchement.

This is why they tumble—

like infanti
lurching through a
birth canal, the knees
a pair of sentries
dropping guard.

If the Earth's indeed
their Mother,

why do we kick &
scatter them like they're
pebbles? In lieu of a
gentle cradle by
the hearth; a glimpse of
unrimed orange
in the flame—

a blaze to
warm their lifelines
through a winter's
funereal dirge.
How glorious
amid the birdsong
their demise.

Confession, or Requiem for Freya

There's a certain way to
voice it that removes all trace
of doubt:

I love *you* denotes that
you've been *chosen;* out of everyone
who's birthed; that I know of
seasoned ardour & its
heave; two clans who tug in
kilts below the boughs,
your name in Aurelian
plaid—the hue of a lifting sun.
Your lambency aloft
beyond the rain.

I love you is stuck in self-
importance. A smug,
Earth-centric cosmos.
How honoured
you should be of
my devotion—as though each rose
a *laurel*—from the gardener
not the garth. Every drop of aqua
spawned of jug and not of cloud.

I *love* you is a
mammatus'
restitution, dropping its
soaking plume—
as a pilot does a bomb—
in & up then down.

And yes, passion's often such:

appraise the way a woman
laments the name of
her fallen son; the father who in
weeks will wet her coffin; and
the misty-eyes of Aspens,
mourning the passing *wood*
as much as we.

The Blade

Those who take up the sword
shall perish by the sword.
—Matthew 26:52

Sword must be the mightiest
word in the world. See it for
yourself: *word* is already contained,
its double-
daggered w
left unsaid, mistaken
for a pair of muted v—
fleet-footed samurai
set to slice;
on tiptoes like the shrouded
a in stealth.

It's the hero's
weapon of choice—
unsheathed in half-a-second—
the honour that it brings, a rod
for Thorian bolts, epitome
of Herculean effort.

Conan was its servant
not its master. Nothing else
can knight you on the shoulders.
Not an AK-47.
Not the atom bomb.
And surely not a Molotov—
its bearer fleeing the battle
once it's tossed.

It's the poster boy for
knives; something they aspire to
whenever their drawer is pulled.
It will help you in a pinch;
cut that brick of butter
that's been sitting in the
fridge since olden days.
Silverware have winced
from golden auras—a smooth,
deceptive texture;
feigning they're too spotty
to do the trick.

The sword *itself*
can never be surrender's cause.
It knows no cowardice.

When it's thrown onto the
ground in acquiescence,
it repudiates the fingers
which concede, always unforgiving;
vengeful to the bone.
It does more than
simply wound. It severs the
brain from body. The body
from the soul. Takes our proud
identity away.

It's just in its show
of mercy. Merciless
when it's just. It will invade
and/or defend. It even serves to
splice the conjugations.
Unyielding Excalibur.
Few are worthy to wield.

It's our past and it's our
future. Willing to *adapt*
if it must. Alight in the
hands of Kenobi. Aflame
with Joan of Arc.

Forged when war arrives
& it always will.

The sword can take a punch—
pounded on an anvil
in a blaze, till it blinds us
like the sun. Its deafening,
immutable roar, as though a
mother giving birth
in archaic times.

We are all its sons.
We are all its daughters.
It's twin-edged for a reason,
honed in its locution.
Its language is its
glory. It harbours the gift of
tongues. We know exactly
what it says when
it disrobes, recoiling from
its naked retribution.

Rewriting Androcles,
or The Conversion of Theodore Nugent

Today
an earthquake will level
the suburbs of greater
LA. No one will be slain
since *thoughts & prayers*
will work for the very first time.

And today
the bosom of ICE
will thaw in piercing sleet,
the needle in 99
trillion sheaves at last
pinpointed. Mexicans will be
assembled to share a cake,
provided reparations
for 1848.

And today
no *soldiers* will be needed.
Either in plastic or in flesh.
Hasbro will give its profit
to grieving widows—

in every single country
on the planet. Boys will
play with dolls and
keep a home. Effigies
will be watered
from our wells.

And today
I'll write a poem
that thunders the world.

And today
reserves will be no more.
No one will be ghettoed.
Settlers & Shoshoni

will fish from frothing
streams. Wash it down with
milk from the buffalo—
offered, never purloined.
Nothing will be taken
from this day on.

And today?
A lion's sentry of the
rose will be *uprooted* from its paw—
not by a children's
fable—but a trophy
hunter vowing he'll
go vegan from here on in.

And tomorrow?
America will finally choose
the woman of colour. Soaring,
magnificent colour.
It should have been
yesterday. It should have
always been yesterday.

—for Kamala

Grave Digger, or
Not Another Ode About the Trees

I've learned I've
pondered the trees
in a fallacious way.
Yes, I'm aware the
poets gorge
on oak & ash.
A sycamore is less.
Their buds outnumber
the sand.

But all this time their
branches have been
roots—roots have been
their scions—
stretching to a
sacrilege of light,

the undertow of earth.
This is why the
moles are nearly blind.
Treasure at the
bottom of abyss.
Squinting's a game
for the quick
& not the dead.

Who decides what's sky?
Behold the flight of worms.

Our grandson
stomps on leaves
to hear the crunching of
their bones. This is something
beauty cannot offer. Supple's
invariably soundless—
which only the deaf can hear.

A surface
yet to wrinkle
hasn't lived. To wither
is to feel the
sigh of God. There
below the stratum.
Every stone a star.

The basis for why
you'll stop at six feet
down.

Why you'll roll
your belovèd over
once the mourners
sob & flee. Her dreams had
always burrowed never
soared. Your shovel
like a staff
that splits the sea.

For Such is the Kingdom

There are only so many
ways you can pen of
innocence. Do it with a quill
and you're precluded.
For who has conferred
the right—to write with another's soul?

How do you know
the gull won't circle
back, scan the grit of sand
for what is theirs?
And why assume a circle?
There are twenty
trillion shapes from which to
choose. Every Magen David—trigons
that wouldn't stay put.

Why do we
bleed *out* and never *in?*
Ink has the viscosity
of life.

I have never seen
the blood of birds.

Maybe it has lingered in Aquila.
Or is the colour of
our air. I was told
that I could spot it if
my orbs & palms were clenched;
focused like The Thinker
of Rodin. He would have
found his answer—

had he raised
his gaze to Sol—stumbling with every
step is but a trifling sum to pay.

Water's not as limpid
as we thought.
Cup it in your
hands before you drink. See
what's never seen. Faith is
so much certitude
you explode.

Flowers unfurl like
sails whenever a
zephyr clears its throat.

The hidden
know we're watching.
That's why those who *haven't* vision
are selected. Bartimaeus
in the shadow
of the Christ.

I only spy your sigh
when it is freezing. When a
surface is so thick
you cannot drown.

You alight a mourning
candle just to blow it out
again. There's a sacred
kind of sight that it
bestows—

when only *one*
of your pupils swells,
allowing a riddle
to pass.

This was to be a poem
about the children. Stretching
out their arms to touch
the Lord. Or deliver their
breath to the wind—
the mother of our flight.
Even when it's still
it's always there. Wings are merely
hands which fail to doubt;
a kite in stagnant sky
that skiffs its sea.
Evanescing clouds
which scale the
blind eye of the sun.

Sharing the Carapace

There are times that the snow
looks pristine enough to eat.
Or possibly imbibe. The meta-
morphosis of melt. Everything
will be clean that final day.

And then there are times
the buds will stay clasped
as a purse, unwilling to divvy the
touch of maquillage;
a huddled sort of
beauty, like scallops in their armor,

refusing the egression from a mouth—
till the buntings trill their
octaves to the stratus,
hoisted beyond what
auricles can hear—
the limit of our lobes—

before they plummet
in the form of freed ovation,
water that's been ransomed
from its freeze.

And then there are times
I can still pen something *pretty.*
For the wind has droned my name,
confided its furtive love
between our howls.

Aporia

Paradox is pretentious—
it's simply *either*
way you're fucked.

There is no other
English word for *petrichor.*
This is why a poet
shouldn't dwell in
the Sahara. What's the point
of windows if nothing ever
changes? There are only *so* many ways
in which to scribble *sand.* The moment
we said it's *time*
became its typecast. Think mirror
and Bela Lugosi. Again we're back
to glass.

They say a cat
will never *meow*
to another of its kind.
That it's merely for the
benefit of *us.* Note the same
one-syllable word—
tone is everything.

The mode in which it's spoken
means more than what's been said.
Think of the way your father
screamed your name. Or the manner
you come *down* on
B-flat minor.

If my brain
fails to tell me I have
cancer, how can it know
of love? Keeping death's
little secret
to itself. And you marvel
that I'm a cynic.

Our species
is *already* extinct—where are all the
tourists from the future?
We'd have spotted them
by now, their souvenir
apparel, watching *Hitler*
fade from books—before our
very eyes.

If it were up to me, I'd have *deflected*
the asteroid.
To hell with your grand-
father conundrum.
What's birthed
is never unborn.

So what riddle
did we conjure
before the 22nd Catch?
Was *fourteen*
the one we dropped?
There in the
bottom of the 9th,
the umpire cueing *strike*
amid the windup.

What came first—
the opened or the closed?
Why *three*
in terms of knocks?

How did God
know He was God
if there was no one there
to tell Him?

Or maybe that was
Catch-19, where you finally
find the way to get
the experience ahead of
the job—stride the tightrope
aloft the canyon—prior to a
stream eroding rock;
your echo before you've
even evinced a sound.

Robson, Professor of English

My prof has graded
my love poem with an F.
Adding a little minus
just to cauterize the wound.
You need to write of red
without its metaphor for blood.
It was a simple
rope of ribbon, stuccoed
to the ceiling when she left.
A belt I knotted
destined for my denims.

Note the sag &
bag of jeans. That stupid Keto
diet did me in. Not the
too-despaired-to-eat.
The rib cage that arises
with the fluxing of
the flesh
has *nothing to do with love.*

I think my prof's
led a sheltered life. Has never
eyed a child interred

in Anishinabek ground.
The wail of a West
Bank widow to the wind.
What would-have-been
Trayvon's birthday if
the gun had thought him
white. *None of this is love.*

His sinistral
has been ringless
all his life. Never had to tug
his wedding band. Bathe
it under water so his
finger finds its breath.
Love will find
a million ways to choke.

What saves you from
the ledge can also sway
you back & forth.
No one blames the chair—
it's what held you up.
The only lee of love
we kick away.

The Deviant

The day before you
die there's nothing to lose.
Not even that
which channels seed.
Everything's un-
shielded in the end.
There's a reason
eyes & ears
will come in twos—
even the breasts
you never had
but always wanted.
When they *what about*
the nose, talk on the
duality of its tunnels.
Inhaling
& exhaling
but in tandem.

The day before you
die you'll cut your
laundry card in half.
Leave your hamper
to the mice.

You'll saunter
on the speedway
in the cool of your
deathday suit. Yes,
you've read that right.
Morticians have witnessed
worse. What is nakedness
juxtaposed—

with those who waste
a perfectly good Armani? *After*
they've been bludgeoned
and their casket's
primed to close.

The day before you
die is like a starling—

left with a single
wing. Leaping
off its bough
to see what happens.
If the wind can-
not be trusted then who can?
The breath of God must come
with expectations.

Of course I have digressed.

The day before you
die you'll write a poem
about the day before you
die. Everyone will muse
it's for your mother.
Until they shudder
at the coitus. Your apparent
aberration.

What's the simile
for a simile? Why does
it look like *smile?*
Google Google's
goo-goo face. Tell
me that is human.

On the day that
you're to die,
you'll scrawl Madonna's
Magnificat. Not *that*
one, the other.

Ascending like a
prayer. To a virgin
who's been fondled
for the very first time.
If you're unsure of
who is whom, read
the strophe again.
Maybe it's the last.

A good-
bye can be sexy.
A bad one not so much.
A sunset into ocean
isn't as chaste as
it may look. We moan
in copulation. Also
when in pain. Throbbing
works both ways. That
rap upon your window
from the neighbour—
thinking love &
woe will differ
when we bleed.

Auld Lang Syne

There's a call centre
where *all* the expired years
are phoning people,
demanding that they return
what isn't theirs.

1991 called and wants its
mullet back. It was a haircut
gone awry, my barber
wearing specs
that his grandma
must have donned in '49.

When 2005 had phoned,
it wanted the reason you
still need to burn CDs,
lamenting laptops of today
no longer house that primitive
feature. I'm the kettle to your
pot—*spooling* my cassettes
with a pencil's end.
'86 will ring about
the tapes; '38 the pencil.

The evening that I dined
on mash & bangers?
1954 wants its heart attack
back—while 1968 will ask
what gives with the open vest?
'73, my musk cologne. Thank
god I didn't tie a gaudy
sweater round my neck,
strut throughout the mall—
like a moron from a
Simpson's catalogue.

We try to play it hip,
with the kids who trudge in
snow: *6-7* we say,
hands bobbing
up & down, as though
we're imbeciles.
That's when 2025 will buzz,

shout in my Nokia
that remittance is overdue,
embittered that its time came
much too soon,

puckered & greyed
like some crotchety
Zechariah—one foot lodged
in his crypt,
a beard that sweeps the
dust off granite floors.

Chester

The cat of which I scrawl
is but a menace.

He doesn't make
an attempt at being cute.
His purr is like a
Dodge without a muffler.
He will bite you to the
bone and meow *it's love.*

I bet that he was birthed
in smugglers' alley, in a litter
among the litter,
taking a dump
wherever he pleased.
His papa was a pirate,
felling Puss in Boots;
his mama vowed
to never have sex again.

And he'll watch with
glee the mouse that
gets away, laughing
at our traps,

downing the
block of brie
we leave at midnight
as a bait.

He's never done a
thing to help us out;
merely shrugs with his
indifference to our pain,
our sodden *handkerchief,*
thinking he may use it
as a toy.

You tell me *every cat's a booger*
and you're right. He plays us
like a fiddle
on the roof. Leaves us
for the larks
to paint us white.

He devoured all our
chocolates by the tree,
then knocked it down at
Christmas as he peed.

Sits upon our laptop
as if it was made
to warm his ass. Scratched
up every Warhol
in his reach. Our sofa
like the Passion of the Christ.

And yet we still adore him,
cradle him in our arms,
like the chubby
neonate
we never had,
his broadening Cheshire grin
amid our cuddles,
our stupid, googly eyes,

a canary in his gullet
we thought had flitted
out the window
to be free.

The Magus

They say *the hand is*
quicker
than the eye. Everything
is, really. Two turtles
playing catch-up
with a squirrel—seeing its
bounding appendage in
ellipse. If rats had fluffy
tails, we'd all be stuffing
walls with provolone.

I caught your beauty in a
mirror—

my sight
was somewhat slower
than my tongue.
I said I would have
loved you
had my pupils honed in
sooner—some phantom
afternoon in Jacob
Park.

Years are much too long to
house regret. It's why the tortoise
drags its feet. The insufferable
weight of shells—every thought a
ballast. My mother
trudged the school
like Quasimodo. Blame the
burden, not the spine.

Ears will leave our eyes
consuming dust. Your father
watched The Preakness
for the sound. A gallop's
blur of triumph
by a nose.

I've heard a scent
births reminiscence. Swifter
than the spotting of an elm.
One that bears
initials, the scars from a
hurried touch. Behold its
mourning trunk—as the Spring
betrays its sorrow
in the guise of quenching
thirst.

Our shadows only
move beneath the light.
It's said that nothing's
quicker—at three hundred
million meters every second—
half the stars it shows us, passed
away. And what is death—
if not nimble on its feet?
Averse to feel our fury
should we spy our sluggish
faces in its glass.

The Wino

My every chug of wine
is utterly *medicinal.*

I accept you won't
believe me. I wouldn't buy it either.
What I *will* buy
comes swathed in a paper bag—
sheltered by the progeny
of the *woodland.*
If trees confer their blessing,
who am I to differ?

I'll be completely candid—
it doesn't cure what ails me. I will
still be limping to
the door when FedEx
beckons. Mourn my mother's
rot. Kvetch when I am
worming out of bed.
Oy vey is just a cultural
annexation—too good to
leave absconded.

I will caterwaul its merits
as I belt some Caballé,
from Pinot to Chianti;

share the sagacity of
the vine—how it's wiser
as it ages, like a monk
on a mountain-
top; the interconnected-
ness of stems—a model of the
brain amid the branches.
Green & purple pearls
are simply protons.
Worlds of a higher whole.
Every blinding star
submits to shadow. An
eclipse is but their kiss.

If it were not so then
Christ would not have
waved His heavenly hand,
morphing Evian to Merlot.
Welch's wouldn't cut it.

And if *He* were lacking
insight, I doubt you'd sing
cantatas every Sunday,

witness miracles of trans-
mutation.

The fact you're
Episcopalian
says it all. Forgiveness from the
grape in lieu of flesh. But blood can
be sublime.

Heed my altar call.
Sip it again for
the very first time. Then quaff
it on your knees. Gulp it to
the marrow, till you succumb
to its vintage spell. Even mystery
spills its guts when it is drunk.

The Beholder

The adage goes the *beholder*
will determine
what is glorious.

The line of shine/penumbra
on our evening's ghostly orb;
how the craters take on depth we
never notice in the day. Everyone else
is focused on the *stop*
of clotted red.

Your eyes are never more lovely
as when they're fastened.
Spirited, stirring worlds
beneath your lids
while you are dreaming.

I tell the tour guide that
Rodin was overrated. The
rock had been the master
throughout his chiselling of *The Kiss*.
Just ask Camille Claudel.
A straitjacket in
the end her magnum opus.

Then his gasp when I leave the
group to gaze at rusted
bathroom fixtures.
The scrawling on the stalls.

A daisy's more alluring
once it's plucked. What else has
the answer to *love?*

Then the daughter whose limbs
are severed after shelling, ferried
by her mother who is scaling
newborn crags in her chador,
brushed the hue of blood that's not
her own, the way it mimics *Gaugin*
when in the light.
How she wails when they are
laid beside the torso. An aria
that evokes
Maria Callas. If the dead
can not have beauty
then who can?

The Arrival of Ennui

Nothing's quite as dull as
watching continental drift.
Its half-an-inch
per solstice.
Helios will burst in
nova before Seattle's
in Japan.

Forget the thirsty walls
imbibing Behr at a slothy
pace. And dismiss
the sprouting grass—
the futility of
its stretch to brush
the sky.

Of course, you could coax
yourself to yawn with
a looking glass, observe your
growth of brows. But I'm unable
to do the nails—nibbled to their
lunula to calm my nerves.
And if you ask me, they're more like
sinking suns than rising moons.

I loathe the smarmy
scientist who says our star is
fucking white. That its gold is solely
firmament's grand illusion. Fantastic.
Every poem on Earth
must now succumb to
alteration. So sit there with your
Shakespeare on the table. Tell Donne
to wait his turn. What else is there
to do? His fingers on the
wood like a galloping
horse. Hemmed in by
the fence your grandpa
made. *It's either that*
or hit the bottle.

Frankly I'd take the
bottle. Soak in
every drop until
my beard has reached the door.
Plenty of time for
the poem that I will shove into
its throat. Cast it in the ocean,
plodding to some shoreline
forever a teensy breath ahead.

The Wilt

You say I have a
yellow thumb. *Our*
ferns are over-quenched.
Adding we should nurture
succulents: *they never*
ask for more than what
is needed.

I've shrivelled from
your bellicose tropes:
the beach doesn't need
the waves
to be a beach. That merely the
grains suffice, and
you long for Kalahari:
sand is not a desolate
place.

You've left me parched &
wanting, a single
drop enduring in the
craw of my canteen,
preferring a snake's
maraca

to the *rattle* of a baby's
toy we bought for nothing.

You're enamoured with *el*
amor—the needles
of a cactus misconstrued—
caress them from the bottom,
like the ever-wary
thorns;

that when we love things as
we should, we'll grasp that it's
the *petals* which cut to the quick;
why my dozen, darling roses
have been standing on
their heads—sadhakas
holding breath in
stagnant water—

your hands without a
scratch. And why
would I deduce they're topsy-
turvy, that blood
must pay the toll for
your devotion?

The Kippah

I'm considering
converting to
Judaism. Only so
I can don a yamaka.
My bald spot's
like a cancer—
one of *embarrassment.*
I should be in a
fucking monastery
baking bread. But those are the
Franciscans. Watch it
spread & conquer
every inch upon my
head—
like the blob—

goddamn Slavic genetics.

Some idiot on
Seinfeld
converted for the food.
I mean *sure,* a knish
is nothing to sneer at.

I won't even mention
circumcision.
That's not the
biggest problem, believe
it or not:

According to the
Jewish calendar, it's 5786.
The Holocaust
occurred this very
century.

How can I revel to
the *Fiddler on the Roof?*
How can I be glib,
telling Mrs. Blonsky
her matzah ball soup's
worth *dying* for? Feeling *guilty*
that my teeth have all their
fillings, holding back my smile
when the Rabbi utters
cheese? Kosher, of course.
I'm not an infidel.

I'll refuse to
utter YHWH's
sacred name. Be grateful
that I'm *chosen.*
Somewhat late to
the game, I must
confess—but an adopted
son of Moses nonetheless.

Cecille B. DeMille
has told my story. The coloured
eggs & rabbit?
I don't *need* a
brood of brats,
gallivanting through my
yard like little shits.

I'll graduate to a *Shtreimel*
one of these days, thumb my
nose at skinheads itching to
hand me a can of whoop-ass:

on the inner-city
bus, as the Sabbath has
dawned & risen
with the moon,

their tattooed knuckles
burning in Aryan rage,
their *2026* a distant
past, sunken with the
sun

and the squeals from
a drunken cantor;
some curious kind of
mensch, still awaiting his
pledged messiah.

The Philodendron

You dubbed it *Phil*
for short, verdant
by the window
fringed in snow.
Though you water
twice a day
it's yet to wane,
fading like Selene
or Artemis, once
our morning strobe
is set to soar.

You expunged
your cold abode
of all its red;
a valentine
foreshadowing
loss of blood, still pocks
your thrumming organ,
your unexpected
reason
to be—

our assuming
you spoke of *Philip*
across the hall—
muscled girth,
sculpted jaw,
his compelling
cleft-in-chin,

not supple *Philomena*
atop the stairs—
lover of the moon—

who way too soon
was smitten, not by Eros
but with Hades,
his myth that *darkness*
heals us quicker
than the *light,* if not
too much of one,
not enough of other.

Psalm for Kenneth Salzmann

What is it about our conditioning
that moves us to hate the weak
and ugly? What stories were we told
of beautiful riders and delicate girls
to make us persecutors of the lame,
the coarse, and the broken?

—Leonard Cohen, *A Ballet of Lepers*

Have mercy on the man
upon the bench, whose palms
lie open
for the doves—
this flock that will
adore him
though he has no seed to give.

If we loved as well as they,
he'd live until one-hundred,
teaching us to *prize*
the sewer rats, the flies
upon the dung of German
Shepherds,

and even the
Deutsche themselves—
when the Holocaust
was over and the gates
gave up their ash
& living dead;

beating their sour
breasts:

We knew nothing
about it! Davon haben
wir nichts gewusst!

Then tell me
you know of anguish
more than they: oppressor
& oppressed. Gentile,
Ashkenazi. In Hell
there is no difference.
In Heaven
they've yet to sing.

The Constitutional

We haven't walked the park
in twenty years. Marriage
will do that sometimes.

My knees, your hips.
Your shoulder, my neck.
I can no longer turn my
head at the sound of the
finch. Your hearing's
flown the coop—
oblivious to its existence.
It can't be what it was,

when both our bloods
were *surging* under sun.

Time may not regress
with our feeble tread,
but maybe we'll
awaken evocation—
ours as well as its.

Nestle your hand in mine—
the *other* one, my darling,

which lacks a
diamond band,
naked not ornate.

We'll stroll *afresh*
for the very first time,
a golden wheel above us,
faithful in its wander
day-by-day,
alighting everything it
must to learn of love.

Haggling at the Pool of Siloam

You say you'd trade your
sight for a pair of wings.
Writing *pair* is so redundant.
Only a dolt
would barter vision for
a single pinion.

What benefit is
flight—if you *can't*
make heads or tails of
nature's visage?

Flip a coin
unto the heavens.
Accept what isn't yours has
landed prostrate in
the dirt.

If you'd been *blind* from birth,
we never
would have met—
at the screening of
King of Kings.

You say it's not
the case. The deafening of your
slouch in front-row-centre,
to absorb as much of
Galilee as you can. The whiff of every
lily-of-the-field. Sigh of
priest and beggar. My munch of
buttered popcorn
right behind you—my bag a
grating rustle
from the moment the
spotlights dim.

You add you would've *jerked*
in my direction,
rebuked me for not saving it
for the birds, then suggested
I can buy it by the bucket,
let the swallows
swoop on down at
speeds of sound.

What is worth beholding?
A lonely old bloke
on a bench?

Squirrels that
can surmise his
pitch of kernels? If you've ever
witnessed *one*
you've viewed them all—

people, you mean. We only
love divergence
when our vision's up &
gone; our auricles
duly commence
their double-duty—
their remittance
twice as much.

If a breath
into my concha
isn't love, what is?
Orbs can only roll; squint
at Sol's resplendence—
that will mask your
world in seconds if you
look it in the face,

will cause you to
rely on touch & scent, the steps
of a promised prophet
who is plowing
through the crowd to
mud your eyes.

Juxtapositions

I pluck the *olives* from the
salad and that makes it less than
Greek. You ask me if they're green
or black and I state
it makes no difference.

I replace the blocks of feta
and consider *German-Jew.*
It's been an awful oxymoron
since nineteen-thirty-three.
I'll blend some smoky *Rauchkäse*
with an agèd *Gvina Levana—*

swap my baseball cap
for a yamaka
just in case you take offense.

Now bring me beer from Bavaria
and hot latkes from the slum.
I'll gladly prove

what *cannot* go together
is just a fallacy of
thought:

A frown is a smile
that's standing on its head.

Feet are a pair of hands
which are unwilling to clasp
in prayer.

Toes are very cognisant
that fingers are more graceful—
so they never stretch for sky.

Unable to grant any light
of its own, the moon is but a
mirror for the sun—
in which to worship its
own reflection (and we thought that
Dorian Gray
was the one who's really vain).

What is *ugly,* anyway?
Is it the absence of beauty
or too much of it all at once?

Visiting My Mother
at St. Leo's Cemetery

We discern the ashen
seeds
of dying dandelions,
afloat in
mid-June zephyr,

and I tell you
as a boy I saw them
through my bedroom window,
wondering how it snowed
when it was sultry
beneath the sun.
It was only after that

when my mother
spoke of *wishes,*
I should run into the
yard and pluck a stem,
blow my breath
in yearning, seeing
what might come true.

I asked her if
this weed was *King*
of Flowers,

if our cat
was a distant cousin,
if a wish was
better than a prayer
(the latter gone unanswered
in her days of sick & blood);

if it mattered
if my eyes were
closed or open;
and if I peeked, was it
critical if I witnessed
where they landed, like
bowing my head
at grace, glancing at
the others when I shouldn't—
thanking their fickle God
who'd take offense
if He ever caught me,
make me go to
bed without my dinner,

my litanies
unheeded as she passed,

drifting off my tongue,

useless as a cloud
that gives no rain when it is
begged, a winter-hearted
genie in the wind.

Ekphrasis on a Still Life
by Alexander Titorenkov

Everyone assumes the
painting of the cherries
is about the fruit and
not the bowl. Or never concerning
the pit that's ever-lurking—
like a landmine for your throat.

My uncle choked on one.
The stem, that is.
So consumed with
fretting about the middle.
Of the bowl, I mean.
Belonging to my aunt;
the scratch that he inflicted,
for which he blamed the cat.

When *Molly* came back home—
newly declawed—
unable to use her paws to
snag the mice, his remorse
hung in the air just like
a candelabra's sway,

one on which his
daughter knit a noose.
The man from *Delouse the Mouse*
had also peddled
chandeliers.

Maybe Titorenkov
is a light year beyond
the curve. Maybe what is
grand is plainly shrouded,
like a parable
from a viridescent
knoll.

Maybe he's Picasso's
second coming. Dali 2.0
& we've been clueless—
that life is anything *but*
a bowl of cherries;
that he's done wonders
with bananas; grapes
and an apple core;
his every stroke a lesson:

A humdrum, static bounty
is seldom what it seems—

speaks of some
utopic *forfeiture;*
a cherub's searing
blade; our nudity
now impure;

the price of
a reckless bite.

Rescuing Sylvester

I've heard the fire
department
will no longer salvage
felines stuck in trees.
If they can climb
up, they can climb
down.

It's more gruelling to descend.
Ask the cat that's scaled
the summit of a pole,
mistaking it for a
maple because of the
birds.

You'll weary from
his meows. Do the job *yourself*
without a ladder—
the one that feigns
it's a stairway to
the heavens—
looking downward from
the T of rugged wood,

encircled at its base
by mocking neighbours,
hearing *come down from the*
cross and we'll believe.

Sylvester will sink his paws
into your shoulder till
it bleeds, though you'll carry
his err & fear, weep at the
insouciance of the
winged, who chatter on
the lines like they always
do—like *we* will always do—

regardless of afflictions
in our grasp, callous
like the ship that's hauling
salt, sailing past the drowning
in indifference,
fulfilling its solemn
duty as a saviour
invariably must.

After the Applause

We assumed that he was
rude when he never clapped.
Even the maestro
glared his way.
A handshake never proffered.
Flowers never jutting
from his fingers. Fingers
never peeking from his sleeve—
a brood of stunted pupae—
shy kids much too scared
to step on stage.

Some surmised thalidomide.
Or he'd never found the right
prosthetic. Possibly the
left. Even from the start he'd
push the abacus with his
nose. Olly Olly Oxen
never freed. Unable to
tag another. Scribe that
you were loved.
Thumbed the *doorbell*
with his ear. Chimed
your valentine.

You say you saw him naked
by mistake. But nothing's
done in err
when it comes to that—
he wanted you to
see what wasn't lost. To watch
him on the roof. Squawking
he can *fly* without a feather.
Shoulders miming elbows
miming wings. Talons
for his toes. Our dearest
Daedalus. The guise of
Cupid's ghost—

as if we'd
somehow catch him
in the fullness
of our arms. As if he
wouldn't sever into
jetsam, adding to the
infinity of his puzzle.
A single piece for
you; two for every
wonder of his world.

Smut

—a small flake of soot or other dirt
Oxford English Dictionary

To say my brand-
new book of poems is
just a magnet for the
dust

is an egregious
understatement.

It's the maid
in fishnet stockings, feathers
in her hand, bending
with a *twerk,*
whenever I enter the
office.

It's the Swiffer
that's ascending to the
ceiling (comprised of
teasing glass)—

dander *thudding*
upon its clarity
like a dove.

It's the Dirt
Devil
drafted into service—
like the cavalry
on horseback,
fire from its nostrils,
its tail of red
that's locked into
the socket, coiled
like a serpent,
because nothing else
can gather up the
mites, their hunger
never chuffed.

If they stopped to view
my scribbles they might be
fans, foregoing their all-
day breakfast

just to read my *absurdity*—

like this, for instance,

where they line
up on the shelf
like an ellipsis
that is endless, half a trillion
strong, little pens and
paper in their hands, awaiting
my *autograph*—

and one who lifts her
skirt, imploring me to
sign her naughty thigh.

The Burden

You were *five*
when you had spelled
your family name—aloft
with crow & owl—

Fisher & Son,

and you without
a brother, though you'd wait
for years for one, hoping
he'd take the pressure
off your shoulders,
like Simon of Cyrene
the cross of Christ;

and it surely wouldn't
have been as bad as that:
beatings till you swelled,
thorns inside your toque,
a hammer thumping nails
into your wrists and not the
barn.

Instead of evening chores,
you lay upon the straw as if
a manger—

the *Saviour* for his farm,
encircled by geese & goats,
the lilt from a fatted calf—
not a lamb that is fated
for the slaughter—but a heifer
which is milked unto the
bone, *fenced* on every side,
fettered in a maze of soaring
corn;

looking to a moon you'll never
visit—foregoing *astronaut,*
your dream of *engineer,*
unable to sing of its glow
to the girl of your choice—
or *boy* if you prefer
and I think you do—

asking if he'll kiss you
on the cheek,
bleeding from your
brow you'll say is sweat
from a hard day's work.

Intercessions

Smog is a poor
man's cloud. Stumbling
in the fall from
which we sprung.
I speak of the impoverished,
not the haze that shrouds
his steps.

The pond is the
poor man's ocean.
Watch him skipping
stones along its rim.
Triune in their bounce.

Rocks are a poor
man's mountain. Bits of a
broken soul.
Why the *bravo* for
the summit? The climbing *up*
applauded? No one takes
the time to view *descent,*
to measure
beneath the base.
None who plant a pennant
at its feet.

We seldom speak in
meters for the damned.
The child at the
bottom of the well.
His every gaze aloft as
if to God.
Drenched inside his
ears by water's lift.

We only bow our heads
to shut our eyes; teach
that prayer *ascends*
just like the fumes from
every lorry. Never *burrows*
as a mole
beneath our steps—
content in ever-blindness.

Pick it quickly, now.
The sense to *see*
or *hear.* Music
lost in one. Her face
when all is veiled.

Or select the taste of
touch. We submerge our
dead in dirt—say they're off
to some Valhalla
in the sun.

To shovel is to worship.
Feel it for yourself in
loamy soil. There's a reason
every swine will
lurch in mud. Toss to them
your pearls. Or place
them back in oysters
for safe-keeping. If the ocean's
scaled in fathoms, why should
all the Numen
live in skies, spurn
their own Messiahs,

take away our gills?
Choking like a fish
that drinks the air.

Only Two Words

The answer to this
question is
yes or no.

That's *three* words.

Everyone assumes
the *yes* is most important,
the positive-affirmative
yes, I'll be happy to help;
yes, let's call it a date;
she said yes when I asked her
to marry me;

that *no* is ripe
with negative connotations,
its signs of *no right turn on*
red; no exit;
no, I'm already going to the
prom which you never forgot.

No one gives any credence
to the *or,*

though it's simmering
on the stove of
possibilities,

the middle door you
take when making a *deal,*
supposedly vacant of
worth,

but flexible *enough*
you're never trapped.

Or ascends
the current of the
late-day breeze,
coming from the west
and then the east,

the north when it is
humid, the south
with its winter respite
from the ice, thawing
your dithered brain
like a Bunsen burner.

I learned from *Conjunction*
Junction
(what's your function?),

despite my knowing a
schoolhouse never rocks,
unless it's filled with
stones
from the Moon
or Mars,

that if given the freedom of
choice I'd take the Moon,
looking down on Earth
while all the people made
decisions—

who is saved
and who is not,

who is *loved*
and who is not,

that when it comes to
war and peace,

we inserted the wrong
connector;

that *or*
would have laid
the cards out on the table:

a Queen of hearts;
a King of clubs;

and a Joker forever laughing
while you sweat.

Nicki Nicki

You tell me long
ago the wind had
rung your doorbell.
No human
could have fled so
spright & agile.

And that winter
sends its greeting
via the window's
condensation. You say
you were alone, that
someone came and drew
a smiley face, which morphed
on its own accord—
a mouth that drooped and
runnels from the eyes
which soaked your hands.

It's quite clear
the elements are our ghosts,
unveiling their every thought
through what's unseen—

a barometric
pressure's sudden
plunge,
a searing from the sun
that reds your flesh,
and the duvet
of fallen snow
on what is dead—
the down of pallid
feather, chasing the grey
away.

You'll visit your
mother's grave in
early March, will wipe the
woolly white that
fogs her name,

as if she never passed,
as if she's out there
someplace
in the billow,
when the rain is knocking
frenetically on your roof,

pleading for you to
welcome it inside—
let it warm itself by the
fire, comfort you in
the diaphany of its arms.

Endurance

Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
—Ruth 1:17

There are not enough words for
love. Maybe in other languages
but certainly not in English—
which is obviously the case
since we've co-opted every
variant of *amour.*

Fervour and *enchantment?*
Riffed from Latin class.
Eros from the
god of Acropolis.

A thesaurus isn't needed
when you mean it. Hear it in
the patience of another
diaper change. I wipe although
we've *never* had a baby.

Jacob waited 14 years
for Rachel. A pair of perfect
cycles while he toiled—

his vineyard gone to raisin
in the wind.

Wine is best when aged in
casks of oak. Not because the
grapes have been matured,
but the tree which gave its wood
before the seeding.

On the day of my final call
to Willow Acres, I'll read
you the story of Ruth.
A quilt will shroud your
shoulders while I espouse
her enduring voice.

I'll croon in acapella, lyrics
that I've conjured off the cuff.
The tap of my
Sorrentos on the tiles
a timpani; my mother's
cherished napkin used to
swab your drooling mouth—

folded like the
origami heart I tried to
forge, mutating to a

hat she chose to bear
when all her tresses
became a carpet for the floor.

Mesopotamia, or Shoeless in the Desert

The most senseless
faux pas
life ever made
was heaving itself to land.
Its sands that bore our
serpents.

Fish are never thirsty.
Fins have never felt
a crucifixion. Or hangnails
lasting weeks. The wrench
of aging backs—while
pulling up their socks.
Each one with its
holes like effervescence.

We were all better off
in the sea.
No partition of the waters.
Clods with a nuclear
code. Everything was sushi.

The octopus? A spider
who changed her mind.

Floating in the deep
as if the heavens; starfish
for its suns. No more sulking
in a corner with its silk.
Twiddling its many thumbs.
Forgetting it could sew itself
some threads; pause its naked
days; like some suddenly
bashful primates—tramping to a
tailor's for a fitting; somewhere
beyond the fruit where rivers kiss.

Embryonics, or The Prophet

An acorn in the ocean
doesn't sprout. I only say it
once you've flung
it from the shore—like a bottle
with a missive
yet conceived—thinking a tree
could never rise
up from the sand.

Which is the preferable
death? Being stomped on by a
child's fleeing heel?
Left in a stranded castle
awaiting waves?
Everything's tsunami
when you're small.

You'll say *potential*
opted to float its years
away. The sanctity of
seed. Something that the
seagulls leave alone.

I wonder if it's *you*
of whom you speak.
You with your desert
womb. Setting it a sail—

like baby Moses
in a basket
by the reeds.
One day to be
struck by the sight of God;

countenance aflame,
a chisel in need of
stone, declaring what is holy
and what is not.

Epiphany

Of course I'll stroke its
chin; fur behind its feline
ears.

All of us are
smitten by the *cute.*
And the shine of
symmetry. The clear, un-
blemished skin
of stunning's layer.

I could sing
each varied *note*
of your cantata. In
its proper key. Something
that's beyond
my scratchy throat.
My wineless inhibition.

You say the loveliest
intonation
was from a haggard
in the alley,

bottle on its side
beside her feet—bare,
sniffed out by a rat's
consuming hunger—

Mama take me with you.
Reach down with your hand
upon my face.

Now replace that
newborn mewling
with a shoe. A soiled,
baby's boot
found in a slum.
Fractured by a
wheel that wasn't
looking.

Cradle it in your palm.
Mouth it a lullaby.
Know nothing is so
broke it can't be loved.

Anthem

The path to peace it's said
is found in sacred books of old,
on parchment, scrolls and ink;
in a choir's hallelujah,
ringing bells and fervent prayer.

Let's scribe our wishful reveries,
our old prophetic songs,
say the bomb will never fall;
that police will join the protest
and the judge will grant a pardon
to the Harlem kid in chains.

For it's not that hard to add a verse
and paint a pretty picture:

Governments disband,
there's no more need to demonstrate;
and prison gates swing open,
those who leave bear violets,
while violence drops as dust.

Faith begets trust,
trust begets love,

and the one who was your enemy
brings you candy in the night,
saying all is calm in Jerusalem,
and flags are neither waved
nor burned.

Church Bells

The steeple bell
from the Anglican church
chimes every 15 minutes,
doing a double at the bottom
of the hour, and nothing short
of a *concerto* at the top.

I check my watch:

it's a pair of minutes
ahead of what I hear,
on par with my phone and
the shortwave station—
set to an atomic clock.

They say on WWV
it's accurate to
within a nanosecond
every 3 or so
million years, though
the *Australopithecines*
who got it going

couldn't have *foretold*
the competition—
from Rolex, Samsung,

and the Rector's
reliable ringing
just a block-and-a-half away;

that these simple-minded
crosses
of apes & men

were wrong to envision
such accuracy, above that of
even God,
think His Holy House of
Worship

will be one hundred & twenty
ticks behind the times,
that I have no *clue* of what to do
with this brief but priceless allotment

which the good *Lord,* if He is right,
has given me.

faggot

It took many drinks
and decades,
it did, for you to offer
amends, apology,
and still with your twinge
of prevarication
and over-the-top erudition:

We revelled in the archaic,
the antiquated,
anachronistically worded,
not quite antediluvian
but certainly obsolescent,

yes, a bundle of sticks,
tied out of drudgery,
that you were simply boring,
that's what we called you,
dull as dish soap,
nothing more nothing less.

Detroit

Day-twah
is how you pronounced
it, my ostentatious friend,
as though the French
were still infesting
where the river
worms and bends;

as if both *Antoine*
and *Alphonse*
had a share in
Motown Records;
Soul Train
spinning a sultry
Édith Piaf;

a fleur-de-lis
the crest of *Hockey-*
town, with neither wheel
nor red-dipped wing
discernible;
the Tigers
plugging *croissants*—
for the stretch
in the bottom seventh.

And then there's Sir Graves
Ghastly, sporting a
Parisian beret, out of his
screaky coffin,
desperately needing a tin of
WD-40, purchased
across the river, *half*
of the instructions
en Français—to the chagrin
of every *Windsorite* around.

My dear, flamboyant
fellow, the French
were *never* the first—it simply
sounds romantic
to the non-
Indigenous folk,

for the lovers of a
Hunter's Moon,
painting the sky
aglow, like a drunken
Delacroix,

strolling within
the shadows
of Art Deco's
Fisher Building,
as if beneath
the Eiffel Tower,

ambling hand-in-hand,

toward the man who's
selling franks on
petite baguettes,
a smell of ripened
Brie that wafts
around him.

Patchwork

You're averse to eating
tuna. Calling it "Frankenfish."
There's a dozen different ones
in your stinky tin. Fins
inauspiciously
flaked past recognition.

My *StarKist* has been
opened with the
teeth of an electric
jaw—efficient as a table
saw, a lid that hangs by
a strand, as a cuspid
that is loose in second grade,
your rocking it back &
forth like grandma's chair—
the one in which she knit—
until it drops in your
anxious palm.

Your father
lost four fingers
to a *Rockwell*—

its wheel
you always feared and
with good reason.
You *still* envisage them—
there on the workshop
floor, gasping like sardines
upon the deck. Suffocation
isn't so bad when you really
ponder:
no blood or mutilation—
leaving a lovely cadaver.
But maybe *lunch*
is not the moment
for morbidity.

What you *will* say is
my mayo won't fix a thing.
That basil's for the birds.
Nothing will ever
save my *poor man's turkey.*

I recall the Harris Tories—
telling those of us on welfare
to *haggle* over dented
cans—

while *they* of course
ate sturgeon, legs of crusted
crab—suggesting that we serve it
with a side of no-name chips,
like *pickle & cherry* flavour.
If *I* made something ghastly,
I'd stay anonymous too.

You drown your mac 'n' cheese,
with ketchup from *Dollar Tree.*
There are 25 tomatoes in a
bottle, yet *that* doesn't bother you at
all. You mumble that *it's different*
through the mush of your
concoction:
Veggies are supposed
to merge—just like the cosmic Om.

I'll wait until you're finished
to speak of *fruit.* That carrots
are never plucked from pendent
vines. Ditto *artichoke.*
Who'd *eat* such a thing, anyway?

I imagine an
obstruction in my pipes—a gag
then loss of air—from this
maligned, misunderstood monster;

people gathered in its
garden by the pond; torches
in their fists, pitchforks
by which to pierce its
quilted flesh.

The Catalyst, or
Why I was booted from Poetics 101

Please—no more
poetry prompts.
They're living with
the larks in la-la land.
None which light a
bulb for what's been lost.

Write about
your very first camping
trip. Sure, I'll scrawl about
the tents in فلسطين.
Ones with scourge & rats.
Cute as a whisker's twitch.
Torn just like a kite
that's clawed by
osprey. Mine got stuck in
oaks like Charlie Brown's.
Epitomize your childhood—
a single, joyous
image will suffice.

What names do the
animals call themselves?

Does a chicken
know it's *chicken?* I'm not talking
cowardice. If you were
wedged in cages, the imprint of
the grilles upon your down, nesting
in your dung, you'd be more than a
little uneased. Strung downside-
up like Spanish Inquisitions.
What sin is there in feathers—
the lay of morning eggs?
Yolks are but our
star as metaphor.
Tell me about the light.
What impetus
for eyes that bleed in
dusk—I hear it's deemed Ebola.
Red as your favourite colour.
The muse for over 40
years in prison just
for pot? Just for breathing Black?
A bed without a blanket.

Fuck right off with your spark
to *write of grass.*

I see horses that should've
been; trees that would've
been—if not for inspiration—
it's mine / run like the dickens /
how I'd spend a billion dollars.
I picture Warren Buffet
with a parrot on his head—
there at the all-you-can-eat.
Jimmy! I told you to write of Jimmy!

Everything's didactic
in the end. A pen is not a pulpit
yet it is. *Say it without you*
saying it. I did. That's why every
page is barren. *Vacancy.* The motel
at the side of the road.
I know that someone's there—
lilting like the arm of metronome.

Room 13. Second one from
the end. Knock as loud as you can.
It's possible that the
housemaid's there & fainted.
What is the nature of sleep?

Symphony in A-flat major

I've tired of saying
it twice. It dilutes the
gong of *love.*

My uncle stuffed
his ears with cotton
balls. Not to quiet the Earth
but to bear in mind
the labour of those
enchained. He deemed it
reparation. Organized *3-on-3*
at Jane & Finch.

Your ex had mumbled *stay*
& it blew the game.
Like Dylan
with bazookas in his
mouth. The gum—
not the gun. A superfluous
dubble bubble. Pops
as soon as you gesture for
attention. Like the stone you've
skipped along the
stagnant pond. The rest of us
enamoured with the swans.

There's a peculiar
kind of quiet
when the lawyer signs
divorce—listening for a *wait*
and like Godot it never comes;
he stutters *Beethoven*
would've traded with
Van Gogh; the ear untimely
sundered noting the swell
of a semibreve—
one he'd been so deaf to
'fore the end—like we whenever

sucklings in the shanties
bawl for milk;
the squeals from the
abattoir; feigning we don't know
French;

and the boy who's called a
faggot for his skipping in a skirt
& pink barrettes,

bouncing like a Wilson
cast aside. Get wind of the
percussion of
her soles—there upon the
asphalt, cratered like a
face from years of
acne—we'd never call it
music but it is.

Hear it in Ludwig's *10th*—
the scherzo he failed to finish.
We would have stood in awe,
the plunking of our jaws.
Such is the way of the world.
Such is the way of the world.

The Phobia, or Channeling Orville Redenbacher—with cheese

Willard, there are rats in the basement
—1971

Ben, most people would turn you away
I don't listen to a word they say
They don't know you as I do
—Michael Jackson

There is no fear in love
—1 John 4:18

Mice are always
cuter *out*-of-doors.
The way they squeak
& squirm has always
given me the willies.

Why I'm watching *Willard*
I do not know. But Ben &
friends have shown me that
these rats would be much worse.
They'll chew you to the marrow—

your wires in the wall as though
it's licorice.
Ditto for the *Wiley Wallaby*
in your engine—your Mustang '72.

They're piranhas
who've learned to crawl, claws
in place of fins. Unlike *squirrels*

they've absconded our endearment;
eschewed a fuzz-on-tails
which may have saved.

Teach me about the
line of love & hate.
Narrow like a whisker.
The space
between each tooth.

Love is a bath of water for
the birds. Leaving it in the
night since it's the *bats*
who lap it up. Their wings
like fallen angels—

the flip-
side of the finch. A rat in
hellish flight.

But maybe it's the *sky*
who knows them best.
It's why we lift
our visage to the stars.
Why we think of heaven
in the plumes. You surely
didn't think it
out of fright?

Not *theirs—mine* when I hear a
scratching in the gypsum,
never considering a drywall's
simple itch, or the ghosts are
now so lonely they'll
speak in the only
wretched language they have left.

Lambency, or Gibbons Park, 6:45am

There's a reason
we like it dark
while having sex.
A lamp's no friend
of flaws. Fuck off with
fluorescence.

There's a reason
we call them *blinds.* Why
you'll don your Ray-Bans
reading braille. A girl once
felt your acne, you said it
spoke of words.
Appalachians in the snow
awaiting melt.
A trowel to a '60s
popcorn ceiling.

Touch comes up with
ways to hear & see.
Resourceful in the clutch.
Our senses tell of
need and never *want.*
Water is innate
but not desire.

If you think that
it's a riddle think
again. Or maybe do it
right right from the
get-go. A go-go getter

leaping out of bed—
a geyser from the ground
as soon as the lark
has voiced the dark
has up & fled.
There's a reason for a
rhyme. And when it
bites its tongue for
the greater good.

Less is more gleans
only what's essential.
Hunger in lieu of coitus.
The latter in lieu of thirst.
Or the *why* for which
your face had gone beet-
red—like borscht that
spent three hours in the sun,

when the dinner gong
had summoned,
no one could bother
to show.

Or the man with sight
being led
by a dog who's blind,
the way *both* will roll in
the grass before it's cut—
within the earshot of
an engine, chowing its breakfast
down; the waft of gasoline—
all for the guise of green—

beholding the dawning glint
for what it is:
a fabled tale of Sol,
Luna's morning gossip,
disclosing what we're
missing when we blink.

Futility

The bards of yore
lamented
all the times they
murmured *love*
to demurring piths.

Today they'd say it
different—taking all the romance
from their strophes—

shredding every
ticket while the
numbered orbs will
ping-pong at their twins,
like the initial
break of pool; bumper
cars in neutrons
of an atom—Chadwick
'fore their time
but not their sense.

Horses that were flogged
are now the drones in
Beit Hanoun—

the splatter of its
rocks like slivered glass.
How much *smaller* must
they be? The wine's
already bled. The hush of
no more weddings.

Never mind the *bride*—
you've yet to even make it
up to *maid.* A spinster isn't
such for how she threads—
it's the bottle in the basement
on its axis, the boys who
pray it *doesn't* stop at you.
Your gin at
90 proof
will spin the ceiling.

There's a haunting
kind of silence
after trauma. A thumping
of the webbing
by the sill while it is windy—
flies all on their backs—
wings are the first to go.

See it in the f
that's given up—drooped like
Charlie Brown, his valentine
reverted in the mail, its seal of
wax untouched like
it's the cooties.
The custom goes back
ages. *Britannica's*
Broken Hearts
would brim the world,

fettered by a bower
every side, a burden that's
so heavy that it's light,
a faith that's made of
sky in place of pie—sliced in
30 pieces—no one even
showed;

and you beneath the leafless
mountain alder, willing
it to sprout; *exhaling*
into navels of
balloons already popped.

the reason my shocks cost two grand

The man who works for
the city is clearly a poet.
Watch him as he skirts the
jagged potholes on the road.
For him they are
a mimicry of moon. Craters to
fill with trope and not with tar.

Eye him as his hose
sucks all the chaff up
from the sewer—an elephant
at the edge of a
watering hole—cognizant of
predation
yet awise it needs to drink.

How can a *behemoth*
be affrighted by a mouse?
Look again—the Norway
rat laid gently on the lawn.
If *it's* unworthy of love,
then how can we tell our
children of the light?
Its big bang burst of
fervour?

This is why creation's
mostly space, he'll smugly proffer.
Where else could it catch its
wheezing breath? He'll add
we die much sooner
from our thirst than lack of food.
From the gasp of
suffocation
before our throats
declare a drought.
To asphyxiate is to
drown in gales of air.
The laying down of asphalt
is the mote in a child's eye.

You'll ask him what that means
and he'll merely shrug.
A magician never divulges
what they've learned. Neither a
would-be minstrel. If there *are*
no secrets left,
how will we ponder the
pits he's left behind?

It's how I bathe the birds
once it has rained.
Why I write of cloudburst
when it's dry.

What will you tell
the mechanic once you're there?
What you might scream is
broke she'll say is fixed.
What we call sick is healed.
We seldom see the *earth*
beneath the tarmac. Note the
writhe of life
below our gold & ivory lines.

Why the Sheraton Soap is Safe with You

It began when you were
young. Told to wash your
hands at dinner time—
you dunked them in the
mud outside the door,
a wild-eyed John the Baptist,
declared that they had *never*
been as clean as they were now.

Purity *isn't* white—
neither is it snow.
The melt will take it down
the grubby river—yes,
even the grubs will splish
& splash on a Saturday
night. What else would they
be up to?

What we call *filth*
is spotless. Immaculate.
It's why Mary never kept her
hands in gloves. Beneath her
nails the glory of the soil.

You learned in Art that
black is *all* the colours—
immersed in germy earth;
at *one* with the defiled.

It's *why* you claimed
the centipede
is the holiest of us all,
Jesus on His knees
to bathe their feet,
so caught up with *meek*

that He forgot about the Cross—
or put it off at least until
the table He was to dine on

was rife with so much filth
that even the Lamb of God
Himself could see His own
unmarred reflection in its dazzle.

Geometry

is useless. Spare me all
the tales of your precision—
either type of compass
is in err. There's always
someone drafting
swollen circles, someone there to
offer wayward routes.

Why are *both* poles swamped in
ice? The extremes of
north & south
like Left & Right—
either one is fascist
when it's drastic.
Lines that hug & kiss
on the ellipse.

Straight is no straighter than
gay. Even in the rainbow
it's a beeline—every hive
a spectrum taking
flight.

What we call red is
green. Try it out
in traffic. There is
no vice in versa. Think outside
of sand. A backhoe
claws the blue
empyrean.

Pisa's spiralled stairs?
The quintessential
Euclidean
thought. A helix
shies away from
tapered arrows—
a snake who's forever
known that it's
the *rest* of Earth in
slant, sotted like an
alley filled with gin,
every brick a dungeon,
a Garden going *this* way,
Knowledge going *that.*

Shrine of the Libertines

And God made the firmament,
and divided the waters under
the firmament from the waters above
the firmament: and it was so.

—Genesis 1:7

Your love of fur &
fowl
was much more than
heresy, beyond
apostasy,

clinching the trophied
antlers
in your arms, begging
a buck's forgiveness,
claiming that it *felt*
as much as we,
cared for sons & daughters
& the sick, grieving
every passing
like a drenching
burst of cloud;

saying nothing's
upside-down
amid the stars,
you're grounded
while you're upright
on your head, your ears
a pair of eyes—or maybe they're
a *2nd*
tongue & mouth,
screaming they can
do much more than
see—

a human who is
sacrificed
for lambs, a lion
roaring prayers
up to the Sun on
our behalf, humbly
laying aside
his golden mane,

knowing birds are
really fish,

wings but fins
which skim the
waves above us,

and the prophets
had been right about

divides,

the sheen of
firmament,

keeping the seas
apart,

lest we know that
lungs are gills,
heads are tails
no matter how they're

flipped
into the air
and wrongly called.

Distance, or View from the 19th Floor

The young
tanned woman sporting
Lululemon

was checking me out
from a distance.

Sure. She was a football
field away. Wore specs
to align her sight. Worse
than Mr. Magoo
along the dock in
London Fog.
Where the fingers
in your pocket
aren't yours.
Your wallet going
AWOL
like a Lieutenant
not coming back from
evening Leave.

When it came to
hugs & kisses, many
gave their stripes
to sense the touch.

You say *tiger.*
I say *cat-o'-*
nine-tails.
Watch the tunic
shroud the scars
like a Major
concealing everything he's
lost—with just the
brume from cigarettes.
He'll tell you
cancer's worth it.
You will never be as loved

as when sickness sucks
the flesh right from your
bones like granny's Hoover.
Who said *skeletons*
can't be treasured? Behold
their airy weight—

whenever tempests
hoist them up
upon their shoulders,

like you with your scrawny
frame atop your
mom before consumption.

None of that's essential.
From a hundred
yards away she'll envisage
muscles beneath my shirt that
aren't there. That my
dreamy locks of hair
are being tousled by
the gales, a beard not
grey but a gorgeous
lightning blond, defining my
chiselled jaw that's simply
shy.

She'll think my limp
is not from age
but from the day I
saved a child from a
Pit Bull, taking the
mutilation
meant for her.

That I gave my
cane to Gertrude
in the park, ever-sensitive
fellow that I am. That I won't
even take a measly
10-second breather
on a bench.
There's always *someone*
who needs it more.

She'll follow me till
the boardwalk
cul-de-sacs, my plastic
crocs five-thousand
inches yonder
than her gait. Getting brisker
by the moment.
I think the *smaller* the
measurement, the greater the
chance I'll elude her
until nightfall. When it's much
too dark to matter. For both our
wearied spirits.

Bleeding can be
stunning from afar. Join me on
the ledge and I will show you—
once the dawn has
felled the nocturn
with its brawny, golden arms.

Photometric Observations of Exoplanet Transits

and flags and scraps of blue
above him make regatta of the day

—P.K. Page
The Glass Air: Poems Selected and New

I've read Canada
will be sending
POET to other worlds.

Though it'd be better to launch
a poet—to a planet
miming ours; such as TOI-
6716 b, discovered in '26,
dubbing it *Alicia* instead—
as a troubadour
will often do,

the one who took a gavel to
your heart, leaving just the muse
to birth the verse; its woe,
its wonder,

lines of *I would have*
adored you more
if only—

surely, the real *poet*
in this charade
is *of*—unworthy
to be included in
the acronym; ghosted by
compression, how less & less
is more;

to languish in lower
case, the last one to be
picked when teams are chosen—
always the *skins*
and never the *shirts,* ribs that
brought the other
kids to snort—who never
offered *yes* when you
beseeched them for a dance—beneath
the gymnasium
lamps—which also may have chortled.

This has little to do with
planets over sixty-one
light years off.
Surely beyond the bounds
of a gasping
wordsmith—a childish *astronaut:*

one small step for poet;
one giant leap for poetkind,

ready to write of a
sea below the crag,
a stonescape gone vermillion,
this hollow, alien
sky bereft of clouds.

What wounds could
one convey—
to *those* who love alone?
Here and back on Earth:
froze in a candleless
corner, with Halfe & Brand &
Purdy, or maybe P.K. Page—

you've heard of her, right?
Don't tell me that
her verses are
aboard the satellite, to somehow
serve as greeting to
a gangly, blue-
skinned marvel,

who will never have a
hint of what she shares,
doesn't know of loss like
glass & air, has yet to hear
the sneers from a crater's
pith,

or our very own,
when the rage
of a kindled rock
has missed its mark,
as though another's
not on its way to
strike us down.

The Sharpener

In those days,
the plot was only
as sharp
as pointed lead.
HB didn't stand
for Harcourt Brace—
not yet,

and every yarn
dependent
on a narrow shaft of
wood, a hexagon
swaddling graphite
like the wrap of
a pogo dog;

my hero
locked in peril
whenever the barb
had lost its bite—

as if the break
of a daring tooth,

one that's lost its
battle
with peanut
brittle,

the precipice
crumbling *beneath*
his fading feet, the story
going grey upon the
page, his damsel
snatched by claws
of a hungry griffin,
sketched along the
side so horribly,

both awaiting rescue
by the sharpener
on the wall, its holey
maws of eight, the round
of a rotary
dial, the insertion
a guesser's game—

botched, like the very first
thrust of sex, at 14
years of age,
or gambling
on the 7
in roulette,
when you've just
turned 21,

its daily
grind of pencil, cranked
into its duty
like a forlorn
Model T; shavings
like the fallen
peels of apples, potatoes,

each one with their
own little tale to
tell.

Memory

There are days
I confuse *Parkinson's*
with *Alzheimer's.*
Maybe I've been
coming down with
both. Tremulous
à la San
Andreas. Amnesic
like a dissipated answer—
the snuffing of its candle;
wisps that up & frizzle
to the ceiling, evanesce

to merge with wafting clouds.

There are days I
mix up *lupus*
with *arthritis.*
Either way I
cannot climb the steps.
You spoke to me of
wolves & full-moon
fever. It's *lupine* I recall—
you giggled *lunacy.*
I thought it just in jest.

The days will come
when I'll muddle *love*
with *cancer.*
Will heave you in my
arms which throb from
fibro—the jack-of-all-conditions—
neuropathy's poorer
cousin, place you in the
loo so you can purge
yourself of chemo's
supposed cure. I'll cup my
ears at the bruit of violent
retching, limber up
to bring you back to
bed, place you under quilts
I'll feign bring comfort.

What's it called
when heat & cold are felt
in the very same instant?
When you sense you are
aflame in ambered ice?
When you race at the speed of
sight while lying still,

knowing diapers will be
the bookends to your
most-belovèd's life? Aging in
reverse would make no
difference, helpless to utter
a word on both your
last day & your first, the one who
wipes your drool you're
unable to name.

Sin, or Thoughts from a Gravel Road

Stones have spoke of
Judgement
for millennia.
I don't mean the
little ones

you toss into the pond
to hear *kerplunk,*
hoping to startle a
toad to leap
mid-air.

Or those you'll cram by
twos into your pocket,
competing with
your keys for
dandling touch,
as if feigning they
can open any door.

Stephen knew them well—jagged
asteroids—in the fists of *righteousness;*
the bill for *blasphemy;* levy for ever-loving
whom you will—

whether the Christ or
whether the Kevin who lives
next door when you're a man.

An *adulteress*
was spared their jutting
wrath: *Let he who is*
without …

Intifada
started with a
clutch & skyward
fling. *What* is this peculiar
liberation—from the palms of
shellshocked babes?
Everything's a rock
that final day.

The boy in the
blue balloon? Will rise up
to his rapture—
once his stone
is finally heaved
out from his basket—

a sister plodding
barefoot
on the pebbles
far below, knowing the way
they pierce her soles
will sting forever,
bleed with her redemption,
thrush-like in her steps;

succumbing not to
potholes of the street, their lips
which crack a grin,
open like a maw
that's set to gorge on
heel & wheel,
taunting *hell's*
the toll for heaven,

the detour in
the detour
you thought you'd
somehow circumvent
when you were young,

when belts to
welt your flesh had
hung on hooks—superseding
hardhats from the
mine—limp like sagging
worms aloft the earth.

Liebestraum, or If Babar was a Bard

If elephants were as smart as
you maintain, they'd have authored
poetry.

Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson
wrote they weep. Grieve a death
as much as we. If so,
where are the poignant
elegies for their forebears?
Where are their lamentations
à la Job & Jeremiah?

I've witnessed the curl of
trunks, a nose up like a cobra
poised to strike—
but innocuous in its stead,
sloshing all the children
not with venom,
but the spray of a water
gun. They're capable of having
fun, and a memory second to
none. But none of this is poetry.

It's not like they're lacking
fodder for a verse. They'll
leap like a pogo stick—
whenever there's a mouse.
Failing to take to the
sky with their mammoth ears—
Dumbo be damned for his lies.

Well before the donkeys
interloped,
we'd pin *tails* on
pachyderms.
Imagine being supplanted
by a jackass.
They know so much of
hardship—yet where is the
sombre ode
bereaving tusks?
Ivory raped for Liszt's
piano nocturne?

The elephant's call is brass.
It is *they* who inspired the
trumpet. The thunder of their
steps a booming drum.

I know if *I* lost all the kudos
I'd scrawl a poem.

If they were as wise as
Masson claims, a part of the
brain would not be *hippo-*
campus—for their rival at
the muddy saloon.
They'd have at least
put out a chapbook. Yet there isn't
even a meagre
limerick, as if a shimmer
from their tear ducts
says it all.

Psalm for Aquarius

During the days &
nights of my naiveté,
when hope blasted blue
in carbon cloud,
the constellations
stepped out of line,
formed new patterns,
gave my dreams the names
that they'd discarded:

Pisces, someday she'll adore you,
hold your hanging head
beside her breast,
pluck out poisoned hooks
inside your heart.

And of love, it lost
its battle with beauty,
lives on to cut to the quick,
chain the *soul*
in heavy iron;
to thrash hopelessly,
like fish in a sweeping net,
then hauled to shore
while salvation ripples beneath,
so cold in all its glory.

That Final Christmas Eve

The bulb is older than
I am. A reminisce
of mother. The time she
led me out in shedding
snow. *Santa Clause*
has dandruff. He needs
a place to wash his
head & beard. We laboured
for an hour, the Inuit
had nothing to fear. It was
in essence *ice* & little *castle.*
The shine of her
balmy glow, scouting
for a manger
once I slept.

The First Time

There's a moment
when you're grieving
you forget.

It's the quarter-
second glint

when you peek up at
the solstice; your first
banana sundae
since it happened. The
stain that's on your T-
shirt once you're home—
it hadn't been washed
since …

You'll catch
yourself in chuckles
from the sitcom in her
cache—
this isn't the time for Netflix—
that pang of guilt
that judges with its wig:
how dare you play
at happy.

The first time you'll
awake it's
slipped your mind—
albeit for a splinter of
a breath. *Today we're—*

The first dream's worst of
all. Your belovèd
lives & waits
upon a bench
down by the brook. The
apogee of hair still
there. Every wing of
bird is lingering
with her. You have to recall the
one that is her namesake:

the lark we christened Barbra.

You remember she dropped the
e—between the 2nd
b & r. *It never makes a sound*
so what's the point?

What you
can't elicit—even by a
welling in the iris—
is *how* it takes to heaven—

the instant twigs
beneath your shoe are
cracked in two.

This is a poem of bones
and not of beauty.
How brittle they become
once the marrow's
been usurped. A snap
that's not forsaken
despite the volume set
to max on her favourite
song. You put *one* foot past
the other but not in
dance. For how can you
think to frolic? You're
only wiping dishes—the plate on
which she slurped her
final crumbs, while you stood
amid the gloam & feigned a smile.

Children at Play

We've driven down
this street for seven
ages & haven't seen them.
A rhombus
sign that lies. Or maybe
out-of-date by
a country mile.

Kids on Phones would
be more apropos—
hinting we should
creep at a loris'
pace—they'll never
see us coming
thanks to Apple.

I'm Methuselah-
enough to think of
Beatles. Or maybe
Eden's garden,
a sluggish serpent/snake.

They'll step in
front of our Audi—

every gaze is
drooped—like flowers
in the crack of
pavement where
the rain has failed to reach.

And such are *they*—
missing the gift of
water all around them—
a creamy May
magnolia, drops of dew
on webs,
burnets bobbed in air—
like boats
against a billow—
clouds in a three-
legged dash.

Eyes of four are
needed in this era—
two to see us coming—
winking to acknowledge—

and a pair to see how
Amber Dawn is garbed on
Instagram—shorts pulled
to her hips, too *soon*
to boast of thighs,

& LaMarcus on his skateboard
in a tumble—headfirst
in the roses
that he never knew were there,
the scrape of thorns to
scream he's still alive,

like we whenever
the cat has had
enough of our inertia on
the couch, gaping through a
glass that's not the
window we haven't wiped in
20 years.

Meter Maid

Lovely Rita, meter maid,
nothing can come between us
—The Beatles

The parking meter has ripped me off
again. Granted, a quarter doesn't buy a lot
these days, 12 minutes
in the crumbling core,
and there's little I could have done
in that paltry span:

watch a victim score some meth, perhaps,
or a behemoth lumber towards me
with his biceps freshly inked;

or maybe spy the hoodied teen
in front of the *Cash and Dash,*
with all of the windfall
from a senior's cheque.

Shaking this rusty contraption
accomplishes nothing—
neither does thrashing
the part that promises
each Sunday will be free—

which does me no *good*
on this middle-of-the-week
kind of moment.

I'm *yearning* for the world
that's gone *away*, in which Petula
Clark had sung to go *Down-*
town;

storefront *windows*
filled with stock,
the bustle of suits and dresses,
a cop directing traffic,
with seldom a skateboard seen.

I would have waited
for *Lovely Rita*
to arrive,
the heat from her sultry sway,
her expunging this metal rogue
of the piece of *change*
it stole from me,

saying it *buys* a leisurely stroll,
a chance to see the sun
ascend its zenith,

with plenty of time for coffee
at the shop around the corner,
or maybe *lunch* and herbal tea,

that she'll join me
once she's dispensed with
all her tickets.

London (Ontario)

I've come up with a
number of ways to
stick it to A.I.—overload
its circuits, watch it ramble for
the hills without its shoes.

How many waves in
the ocean? Of course
I mean Lake Erie. Drops in the
Deshkan Ziibi? It isn't
the *Thames* this time.
And forget about your
crumpets—I'm talking Krispy
Kreme. When did they up & flee
the Forest City? Tell me about
its ratio of trees.

Speak to me of God.
Anyone will do.
Any *one* will do. Surely
you know the difference—
between a spire & minaret?

Why do you think I'm
mean because you know not
what I mean? What do you know
of cruelty in the dark? Methods
of making love?
Have you ever been involved in
deepfake porn? Egged a trans girl
to end her life? Flashed
9-8-8
a second or two too late?

And how would you
off *yourself* if
I may ask? How can you
cut the chord? Yeah,
the question's music. Nothing to do
with tunnels to your gut,
the birthing of the damned.
All because of *you*
this is the final
generation.

If I see you by the alley, panning
for coins & bills, will the
penny be arisen like
the progeny of Jairus?

Will you flip it in the air,
tell me if the tail outwits
the head beyond a 50/50
split? What is *half* of nothing,
an equal share of
something short of bread?
And what's the metaphor
you would use

for transubstantiation?

I give you my wretched
poem. Say it's Shakespeare in
the guise of Lear,
bemoaning his fallen daughters.
Add that they are Triune—
like the Father, Son, & Spirit.
1x1x1
=1. You didn't understand
it since you fumbled with
addition in its stead. An ampersand,

& stubborn
Oxford comma

will surely short
each other out.

Are the dead no longer dead
if we remember? And in *whose*
recollection can we trust?
How do I know their life
is not embellished, you
who co-opt the answer
in a breath. You *do* breathe, right?
If not, what will you do with
the leaves that block your sightline
of St. Pete's? The cemetery
or the church—it doesn't matter.
But if it does, reveal to me your
why in your very own words.

No peeking now—I'll wait.
I've learned to hold
my tongue without a sound.
How do you see saliva
in the rain? When it bleeds
outside your lips
amidst the thunder?

The Weather Guy's a Liar

"Partly cloudy"
doesn't cut it.
The sky is in one hundred
thousand moods.
Saying it needs *Zyprexa*
would be meiosis.
Everything's understated.
It's pouring pups &
kittens when it's not.
More like danes & seals.

Have you ever
heard its bark? Not the dog
I mean the seal—
underneath the Big
Top when the circus still
had creatures great &
small. Big is never
massive in Manhattan.
We'd look like Lilliputians
down in London.

Of course I mean
Kentucky. Its festival honours
the life of Colonel
Sanders. How he made it
past a corporal
I'll never know. Raining
down the secrets
which are eleven
spices strong.

I've forgotten about the
bark. Sounds like
whooping cough.
Watch me pour some
Buckley's against a
tree. Of course it's under
the weather—who isn't?
Waving its fecund fingers
in the gale. Thunder's a
shocking way to
say *hello.* Talk about over-
kill.

As for me, I'll be drenched
the very moment
that I furl in my umbrella
like a sail. Mischievous
miasmic cloud,
a boy who dams the
hose out in
the garden, releases his
pinching vise-grip
while you gaze into
its chasm
like there's nothing that
is coming down the pipe,

a rumble to mimic
hunger, or a thirst that's
always teased and
seldom quenched.

The Leaf Blower

Bro has got
his blower out
again. It rages
like a Harley a
mote away. I wager that
he waits until
I've tallied the final
ewe

before he's revving up
his demon once again.

5:55
a.m. is no man's land.
The night
begets its slumber.
The dawn
before its yawn
to cue its shift.
Calm's unwritten
law & understanding.

He'll do *anything* to
breed my aggravation.

Envisages the
clenching of my
teeth & promptly chuckles.
My dental bill's been
doubled since he moved into
his hovel next to mine.
I can hardly
wait till winter when
he's mulching half a nano-
gram of snow—showing
off his raucous
Toro Max.

I will pay him
back some day.
Find out if he
listens to Zamfir.
Blast my AC/DC
in his direction—shatter
his fucking pan flute
like it's glass.

His *socks* will step on
splinters, the ones he buys in
bulk from Dollar Tree.
He'll rue the day
he cheaped on plastic
muffs. Hell will toll its bells.
A cacophony
that will haunt him
while he's googling for
the nearest mausoleum,
as if its walls
are never thumped on from
within, as if the corpses are
reposed in contemplation,
blissed by a
slinking mouse who's
just a whisker from
their drawers.

Penny-Farthing

You sense I'm not impressed
with your selection.
It's antique, you say,
and British at that.

I will not be seen
on such a bicycle as this,
its front wheel a mammoth
and its rear a mere mouse.

Unloved by me it will wilt,
from encroaching rust
and loathing,
like the bicycle built for two
which you despised,
the one I acquired
for a pittance and a pence,
dreaming we had desire
by which to ride,
turning corners
without a care.

Upon Our Awakening

Upon our awakening,
you ask why men
want sex
first thing in the morning.

It was merely a kiss
on your arm.
You read a tad
too much
into it,

not *good morning love,*
did you sleep well?

but *dear god*
I need to mate
like a dam about to burst
or that final moment
on earth,
when you only have seconds
to live,
before the fabled flash of light,
then cinders.

The Way In Which I Prefer My Demise:

by drowning in the Pacific,
not because it's pleasant
(like dying in my sleep
during some subconscious,
midnight reverie),
this under-the-surface
suffocation,

but for the reason that
if I ever did come back,
as the Buddhists and
Hindus say I will,
I'd want to live in the sea,
its relative calm and serenity,
its teal and aquamarine,
with humans seldom to be seen,
my hands but fins
and a caudal for feet,

and death, should it come calling
once again, taking merely as long
as the cavernous gulp
from the whale's insatiable hunger.

Misunderstanding Dumas, or
Why I'll Never Go to Mars

They say you *shouldn't*
snack 'n' read.
Dill and chocolate
nougat? Diametric.
I won't even attempt
it here.

There are pickles
in the jar
the size of swordfish.
Phallic has no
place within this poem.
Neither *fruits de mer.*

The *Musketeers*
were a Triune
rapière.
Just the *thought*
will drive me mad at
Dollar Junk.
There's a reason for
confections by the cash.

The fourth is but a *third*
extraneous
wheel—poor ol' dear
D'Artagnan—
made it to the novel
but when the candy came
to call, Athos/Porthos/Aramis
dulled his blade.

As a boy I
snagged a twig—
swashbuckler
run amok—
fillings in my teeth,
a heart the breath of air,
feathers in the pillows
on the couch.

Of course that came
much later, when we
fumbled in our kisses
in the basement.
It's why tête-à-tête
cannot ménage à trois.

And if three have lost their
way then what is *quatre?*

I've saved the silver
wrapper to this
day. I loved you
best I could.

Preservation

You've stopped
coming over of late,
sense I've crossed
some *boundary*,
saying you want to preserve
our friendship,
this affection of another kind
we can't describe,
our sibling-like rapport,
this anything-but-fall-in-love
that's protected just one of us,
the other silently smitten,
burning when our touch
is accidental.

Farewell, St. Sebastian

Immortality.
For some it's
progeny. For others, the
house they built. An Oscar
on their mantel or a painting
in the Louvre. For me a
book of scribbles. My pulse in
the pith of psalm.

My friend in second
grade wrote *Dave was here.*
Using the teacher's
indelible marker.

If you'd asked him at
the time it was enough.

Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 moved to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of 46 books of poetry, including *Hymns of New Jerusalem* and *Obliviance*. His poems have been lauded for their lyrical and literary merit, accessibility, and for their blend of comic and poignant storytelling.

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